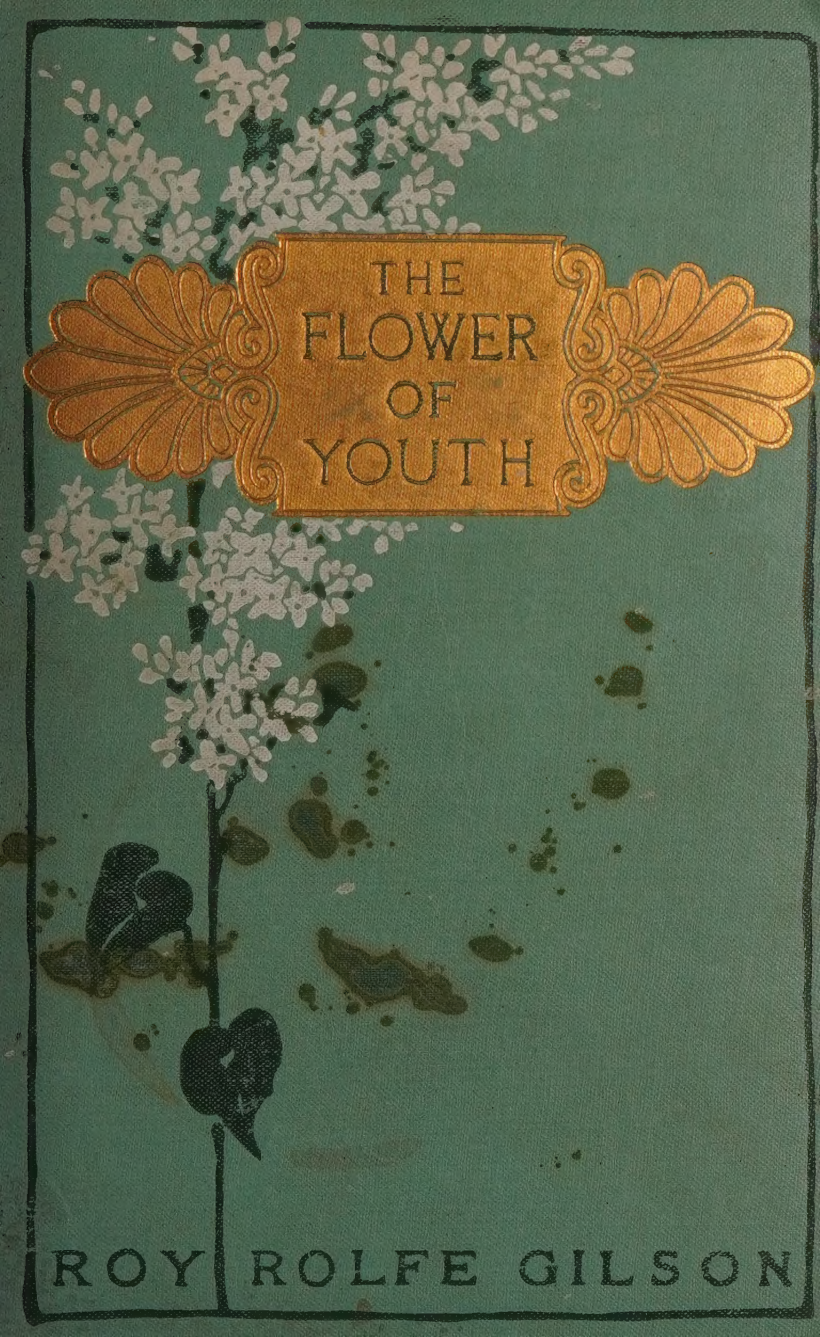
THE FLOWER OF YOUTH



ROY ROLFE GILSON

THE FLOWER OF YOUTH

A ROMANCE

BY

ROY ROLFE GILSON

AUTHOR OF "IN THE MORNING GLOW"
"WHEN LOVE IS YOUNG" ETC.

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TO
MY FATHER

PART I

THE TWO SHADOWS

THE FLOWER OF YOUTH

I

NCLE JERRY," said that schoolgirl, Barbara, shutting my *Pickwick* in my hands, robbing my mouth of its very pipe, and seating herself upon my knee, "did you ever have any adventures?"

"Well—" said I.

"You know what I mean," my niece went on, her eyes widening, her voice sinking to an undertone—"I mean exciting things, where the plot thickens—fights, or love-affairs, or h-hair-breadth escapes!"

"Well," said I, gathering my strewn wits, seeking some story in that eager face,

and finding none but the mildest of memories, "no, my dear."

"Oh, didn't you, Uncle Jerry?"

"N-no," I repeated, dropping my eyes, hers were so half-reproachful. "Why, yes," I said, brightening, "I did have a fight once, now that I come to think of it. Butch Duffy was the rearingest, tearingest boy in school, and one day—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that kind," said Barbara. "I meant a man-fight."

"I'm sorry," I replied, "but I never had a man-fight."

"Weren't there any wars to go to, Uncle Jerry?"

"None to speak of—that is, none around where I lived."

"But you and Aunt Kate—"

"Well, I shouldn't call them wars, my dear."

For a moment then my niece looked puzzled, she is such a sober bit of thing.

"You didn't let me finish, Uncle Jerry. I was going to say: you and Aunt Kate;

didn't you ever have any—any romantic —well, times together?"

"Oh yes, many and many a romantic time."

We were on firmer ground, my niece and I. Deficient I may have been in wars and rumors of wars, guilty even of a gross negligence in those martial matters, but romantic times — stars! I was something of a man then, after all.

"What, for instance?" asked my niece.

"Do I understand," said I, "that you ask particulars?"

"Um."

She nodded. Her lips were parted as she gazed off into that long distance which even the shortest of little rooms provides, her eyes—her blue eyes—shining with what she saw there; I know not what, for I never was a school-girl. To be one, judging from my niece's face, is something of a day-dream long drawn out.

"Go on, Uncle Jerry."

"Well," said I, "we—walked, for one

thing, I remember, Sundays, in Beecher's Lane."

"Don't stop, Uncle Jerry."

"We walked," said I—

"In the moonlight, Uncle Jerry?"

"Oh yes, right in the—right out in the moonlight, you know, the beautiful, silvery—"

"Yes, go on, Uncle Jerry."

"We did. First we went on, on and on, as I say—right on past the old red barn, and on past the dairy, and on past the mill, till we came to the meadow-bars."

"And then!" whispered my niece, and I swear she was holding her breath.

"Why, then," said I, "we just came back again."

"Oh, Uncle Jerry!"

"Of course," said I; "what else—"

"But your hated rival, Uncle Jerry?"

"My what?"

"Your hated rival, you know."

"Ah! Well, you see, there wasn't any."

"Didn't anybody love Aunt Kate but you?" cried my niece, aghast.

"Oh yes—yes, yes," I replied, hastily. "Your aunt Kate had a great many admirers. Many and many a young fellow would have been glad to become your uncle, my dear."

"But didn't they challenge you?"

"How's that?"

"Challenge you—to fight for her, you know?"

"N-no; not that I remember."

Her face fell.

"I think they were a pretty poor lot of sticks," she said.

"But you wouldn't have had them hurt your uncle Jerry, would you?" I asked, soothingly, smoothing her brown hair.

"No, but you would have whipped them, of course," she said.

"Oh yes—of course, I—"

"In Beecher's Lane, Uncle Jerry!"

"Sure."

"In the moonlight, Uncle Jerry!"

"Dear me, yes!"

"With your sleeves—"

"My sleeves!"

"R-rolled—r-rolled to your elbows! Oh, Uncle Jerry," she cried, throwing her arms about my neck, "how I *wish* I'd been there!"

"So do I. So do I, my dear. I should very much like to have been there myself," I replied, and with no little fire, though borrowed, I confess, from that glowing face. Indeed, there was a moment then, with her eyes upon me, that I even fancied it all might have happened as she had said.

Barbara sighed.

"Then nothing ever really happened to you," I heard her saying—"nothing novel-ish, I mean?"

"No," I said, crestfallen again. What would I not have given, say, for a burglar burgling in some midnight of my past? "No, nothing novel-ish, my dear."

There was a silence.

"I've been reading the loveliest story," my niece confessed, in a hushed voice.

"So I imagined," I replied.

"All about a hero, Uncle Jerry."

"And his name?"

She pronounced it reverently.

"Bonny Prince Charley"; and then again, even more gravely than before, and lingering tenderly upon each syllable —"Bon-ny Prince Char-ley."

"A charming fellow," I observed.

"Oh, you know him, then?"

"I've never met him, but I've often heard of him," I explained.

"Uncle Jerry," said my niece, with fervor, sitting bolt upright upon my knee, "he was the loveliest man I ever read about."

"But don't you think," said I, "that as a matter of fact he turned out to be a—er—trifle—"

"Oh, not at all, Uncle Jerry. The book says—"

"Ah, yes, the book! To be sure. I had forgotten the book."

"He was gallant of person," chanted my niece, quoting, I fear, "with a smile so— Oh, Uncle Jerry, if I were a man, do you know what I'd do? I'd go and be a hero, too. I'd go and *do* things. Why didn't you?"

"Go and do things?"

"Yes."

"Well," said I, "I was always so busy, you see, just pottering around making a living that I—"

"Heroes are awfully busy, too," said Barbara, "but somehow they find the time."

"I know," said I; "but you don't understand; you don't grasp the situation. Don't you see—has it never occurred to you that if we were all heroes, every man Jack of us, it wouldn't be wonderful at all to be a hero, my dear?"

"I never thought of that," said Barbara.

"Of course you didn't," I replied, with all the reproach I could fairly hurl at her, without, of course, actually hurting that tender heart. "Remember, hereafter, that some of us have to *not* be heroes in order that heroes may—*be* heroes, my dear."

The climax lay less in the words I chose than in the flourish of my voice and hand.

"I see," said Barbara, "but I'd—I'd let the other fellows not be the heroes, then."

My sword was hers.

"That's very brave of you, my dear," I said. "As for myself, you see, I have always—always from the first—been an ordinary man."

"Dear Uncle Jerry," she said, impulsively, taking my face in her soft little hands. "Do you know, you must have been awfully good-looking once. You have regular apple cheeks, Uncle Jerry."

"Tut! Apple nothing!"

"Round and ruddy," said my niece, "and the loveliest, kindest old mouth that ever—"

"Look here! I won't be coddled."

"Oh, Uncle Jerry, you're such a nice, uncle-y goodman," she said, and with a laugh, and roundly kissing me, bounced suddenly to the floor again, where her book lay open on the hearth-rug.

"Tut!" said I, and, ruffled, regained my cold, black pipe.

"Uncle Jerry," said my niece, softly, finding her place in that wondrous story, "you couldn't look fierce if you tried."

"Humpf!" I retorted. "If you were my child, I'd—"

"Why, Uncle Jerry," asserted that impudent young miss of teens, thrusting out at me the red tip of her saucy tongue, but so roguishly, so Barbara-ly, I had to smile.

"Uncle Jerry, you wouldn't scare a r-rabbit!"—and was off with Charley.

II

EAR Barbara. . . . She had put me in mind, somehow, of a little boy I had known once, who was to grow up and be a hero, with men to love him living, and girls, I suppose, to love him dead, even as Charley. He was a bare-legged little boy with wriggly toes, and his touseled hair stuck up through a hole in the top of a straw hat with a brim so tattered there were sprinkles of sun on his tanned face. He was not a clean little boy—"For how can you, mother, when the frogs stay where it's all muddy and won't come out at all?" He was a real, what you might call spattered little boy, and no matter how hard she sewed the buttons on, I

remember—"Why, mother, they just came right apart!" he said.

But he was to be a hero. He knew it himself, for he had spelled his way through the Third Reader and knew how heroes came about, starting as little boys, every mother's son of them—starting in log-cabins, even, and patches on *their* panties, and ending, all dressed up, in the White House, or on prancing horses, and with swords waving in their hands.

Was it not all written down for little boys, how you could be a hero if you tried? Then they would put you in the history of the United States, with all your dates, and even your middle name, and what poor but honest parents you were the son of—and where.

Why, if that boy sat down anywhere—on a log, say, in the back lot, or out in the hammock, or where there were story-books—he could think of the very hero he was going to be, and I have even known him to see it all so plainly in the air he

would jump to his bare feet, crying, "Charge, men!" when not another soul was there.

And another reason why he knew he would be a hero was because he was smarter than other little boys—except in 'rithmetic, which did not count, for there wasn't a book anywhere in the whole house about a hero who was smart in 'rithmetic.

But joggerfy and hist'ry!

Of course, a hero would have to be good in joggerfy, so as to know where the quickest ways were to get anywhere before the enemy could (get anywhere), and hist'ry, so as to know what the other heroes did—and how.

Now Aunty Sniffin lived just around the corner by the Methodist church, and if he happened to be there when she was making things—cookies or anything like that—so much the better. Climbing his back fence, the little boy could look across lots to Aunty Sniffin's and tell whether she was or not, and if she was, he could

just be going by—which was usually Saturday in the morning, and, gee! no school.

So it happened, I remember, that he told her once, with his mouth full of whatever it was that day, all about the particular hero he was going to be, and she said:

"My, my, my!"

And he said:

"Then I'll have you come and live with us, Aunty Sniffin, in the White House, and make all my cookies; and you can sell what's left over to the Senators if you want to. I sha'n't care, just so you keep a-plenty in the crock."

Aunty Sniffin laughed and said, "All right," it was very kind, and she would, and how soon should she pack up?

Then the little boy thought a moment, and he said:

"Well, in about twenty-eight years, I think, Aunty Sniffin, 'cause I'm seven now and father says you have to be thirty-five. They won't be ready for me awhile yet;

and, besides, I'll have a good many things to 'tend to first, I s'pose."

And Aunty Sniffin said—for she was a fine, old, soft-cheeked lady, and always willing to do anything for the boy she never had:

"All right, darling; I'll just wait for you."

And that was forty-one years ago!

Forty-one years, my Barbara, since the little boy told Aunty Sniffin—forty-one years last spring . . . spring, I think it was, when he told her . . . spring.

III

O, she could not wait for him, he was so long about it, and, besides, soon afterward he moved away from where Aunty Sniffin lived to another town.

It was a long journey, with cakes and surrup in the middle of it, and that thick, sweet, golden middle is the only part that he remembers now. It is like this to him:

First, there is nothing—black, blank nothing; then, suddenly, it is a grayish, dawny, spooky kind of light (though he does not remember being waked or dressed) and he is sitting at a table with buckwheat-cakes right there in front of him, a whole brown pile of them, hot and smoking, on a plate; while over a wide and

smile-y kind of lip of something round and fat, a tide of surrup—not syrup, *surrup*—s-u-r, sur, r-u-p, rup, surrup—is pouring like Niagara but without its roar, and falling in a sparkling puddle on the cakes. Slowly, then, it spreads to a molten lake, spilling, dripping over the crusty buckwheat edges to the blue china—and all the while sits that little boy, wishing, hoping, praying that it may not stop.

But it did stop. There was a kind of click and the flood ceased, and that broad, that shiny, lippy thing withdrew, followed cautiously by that little boy's bright eyes, lest they lose track of it in the gloom; and there in the distant centre of the table it squatted down with one big, golden drop which it had not licked, hanging pendant like a jewel from its gleaming mouth, and about to fall, alas! and be lost forever. And there it sat, that fat, round-bellied jug, and smiled from ear to ear complacently.

The little boy kept one eye upon it as

he ate, lest suddenly it up and run, but it stayed right there a-squat, and with never a yawn from its jewelled lips till, not long after, he passed his plate again.

Those were the griddle days when cakes were cakes! They were never burned and never doughy, or—what do they call it?—sad; no, they were never sad, to eat or remember. He recalls them all, that little boy does, all that he ever ate, with impartial gratitude—all, that is, that he ever ate as a little boy, for there are no cakes like them any more. There was a certain crustiness about their edges then, a certain grace about their middles, so that while six in those days were a bagatelle, four of these modern cakes are quite a plenty.

Still, even that were easy to be borne were it not for another and a sadder loss. He did not know it then, that little boy eating those cakes in that wintry dawn with the distant sound of frying in his ears; he did not dream that he devoured

there all that was left of that golden flood —the last sweet, sparkling dregs of that Falstaffian jug—ay, worse than that!—the very last of that magic surrup *ever made, or barrelled, or sold, or poured on cakes!*

He ate the last!

For though he was to travel far and wide—once to New York, that is, on business, and twice to Boston to see his aunt; though he was to eat his cakes on many a plate and winter's morning in the years to come (in years that have intervened!) he was nev-er, nev-er to find its like again. Surrups there have been, surrups there are to-day, surrups there will be as long as there are jugs and cakes and little boys—but not like that! Not half so golden-y, not half so thick and golden-y, Barbara, not half so heavenly-molassesey as the surrup in that never-to-be-forgotten buckwheat middle of a long journey, the rest of which is as black and void as a night without a star.

Maple?

Fudge! Fiddlesticks! It was nothing like maple—not even the Vermont.

Sugar?

Bah!

Golden Drip?

Nonsense! Just because it was golden-y!

Why do you doubt him? Was he not there? Did he not roll it like nectar upon the very tongue that moistens at its memory now? Has he not hunted for one drop more of it—one, only one, in Heaven's name!—but one drop more of that magic surrup of his youth? Has he not begged them, cooks and waiters and grocers all? Has he not told them just how it tasted, just how it looked? Has he not ransacked the whole green waving world of the Southern cane?

Ah, had he only known what he was eating there, that little boy! Had he but known that the town he was bound for would have no drop of that precious juice in any of its jugs or joys, he would have

spread more thinly and munched more slowly, and made it last.

But there he sat—where, he knows not—perhaps at some uncle's where they spent the night, half-way. There is a woman there, now that he looks more closely, or a something like one, shadowy, standing by his side with the pancake-turner in her hand, but felt rather than seen; and there is a littler shadow, probably some forgotten cousin, probably eating by his side.

More he knows not, for all the silvery light of that winter's morning falls like a halo on that surrup-jug.

Then all is dark again.

IV

HEN it is light once more, lo! there is the little boy, but taller by an inch or two, living, as if he had lived there always, in that town beyond the jug. How long he has been there for the life of him he cannot tell you now, nor how he got there, nor how they unpacked the furniture and set it up again in that strange house, No. 12 Chaffinch Street. Yet it must have been an exciting day for him when for the first time he ran up those three gray steps to the ample porch, which he cannot remember climbing first at all; when he first crossed the threshold of that white door, which it seems now to him, he tells me, that he had always entered, turning its

mottled, marble-y knob; when he went inside to discover, room by room, up-stairs and down, that new-old little house which was to be the scene of so many of his years.

Surely he must have noticed the honeysuckle running wild upon the porch, for it was spring. Did everything happen in spring then, that it should be always that flowery season whenever he sees himself as a little boy? Well, say it was spring; for remember, we can only imagine that first day in Chaffinch Street, since he does not recall a golden moment of it himself. Call it spring. Then the honeysuckle must have been green and the lilacs at the bay-window must have been blooming. But suppose they were, and no matter how sweet the little winds were blowing from them, doubtless he scarcely would have noted them till he had finished with the house itself, parlor to kitchen, garret to cellar, and had come outside again. Or would he have done

the outside first, do you think, my Barbara? Pshaw! you cannot tell—you are not a boy; and he cannot tell—he is not a boy any longer.

We have called it spring, and the honeysuckle green and the lilacs lilac. Let us say then, too, that he ran first through the odd little house, a gray-blue little house, it was, with white trimmings. Was the house empty that first time, or was the furniture standing about mumpish-ly, swathed in gunny-sack, or had they gone before and settled it ere the little boy came to that town beyond the jug? Let us say they had settled it—we said it was spring. Yes, they had fairly settled it——and it is easier to say it so. They had fairly put it in its new places, and the white curtains were hanging at the front windows, which began at the very floor and grew tall and opened like doors on the porch, to let little boys out and little springs in.

And the carpets were down and the pict-

ures were up—the dark pictures, the "Signing of the Declaration," and the "Washington Crossing the Delaware," and the "Henry Clay in the United States Senate," all hung in the long, prim little parlor where the chairs were plush and red. And in the dining-room, with its windows looking out upon a bit of garden, were the fruit pictures — oranges, apples, grapes, and plums in luscious piles that made his tongue to swim. Not then, of course, not that first day, for he was noticing the bully place to keep his shinny-stick when he should come in hot from play; too much hurried he was, with rushing, clattering up the stairs to that little room they said was his, and noting from its window the pear-tree's nigher limbs. And why? Aha! my Barbara, you are but a girl and would never guess. Sh! Now if you, say, were a boy—and they kept you in o' nights—when the other boys were—m'm—looking, as it were, at melon-patches—by moonlight—would not you

be grateful for a pear-tree's nigher limbs close to your prison window-sill? Tut! what were we saying?

He must have seen those things. He must have seen, for instance, those five enchanted windows in the vines where sparrows slept—that little bay, I mean, through which the morning came all golden and tinged with leaves. Down-stairs that was, in the left-hand corner as you faced Chaffinch Street, in a little room of pipes and books and memories, where the chairs were gardens of great red pomegranate blooms.

Then he ran out-of-doors. We know he did, though he does not remember. He sprang out-of-doors to the level turf, and squinted an eye at the pear-tree from below. There, too, was a nigher limb just low enough for the hands of a leaping boy.

Then he tried the garden and wondered would they make him dig or would he dig there only when he pleased and played, a different matter. Then he smelled the

lilacs! Ah, yes, then he would have smelled them—the lilac lilacs by the bay-window and the white lilacs by the fence, and would have seen that the fence was low enough for a boy to vault without going through the gate. Then, too, for the first time, doubtless, he clapped his eyes upon that sandy, pebbly spot under the water-spout at the corner of the porch — his California where he washed for gold.

Odd, is it not?—odd that he should ever forget that beginning there, which must to his boyish eyes have been so wonderful, but which, now looking backward, does not seem to have ever been. Strange, that after the surrup-jug and the darkness which followed but could not obscure its sheen, he is at once that school-boy, taller by an inch or two, as though nothing—no first, sweet breath of lilacs even —had intervened!

V

TALLER, yes, but still a little boy, as he now sees himself as he was then, for even as it is always spring there when he turns and looks backward as far as he can see, so also the boy he sees there is a little boy, even when he has left the surrup-jug far behind him and has lived for a long time in Chaffinch Street. Yet he was not so little as he then saw himself — or was it the hero he saw there struggling within his meagre frame?

It was the hero.

He did not know himself from a major-general. He was heard to tell Sherman—Tecumseh!—to bring up the rear. He was seen on the same afternoon—for he

could twist time by the tail—at Yorktown returning a proffered sword.

Yet that was something which Chaffinch Street never could be made to understand. If he said "Bread!" as Cæsar or Wellington or Grant would have said it, they thought him short with them. Ay, and chided, little dreaming that they balked a field-marshal at his frugal meal.

If a fierce light shone in his eyes, if he speared the pickles, if he charged the beefsteak or outflanked the pie, they talked of manners—those poor though honest parents whose names he would link with his, and his dates, in United States history.

If he rose from the table and strode away—

"My, what a noise he makes!" they would cry, peevishly.

If they had worn cavalry-boots, if for them a charger had waited, champing its bit, at the door—tut! what did they know of the army, they who could not distinguish in the smart clatter of his heels upon

the floor the martial tread of a major-general! He could not wear the stars of his rank, it is true, but he could make the noise of it, and he could cultivate the sternness of its eyes and the pride and bravery of its bearing.

It would have warmed your romantic soul, sweet Barbara, if you could have seen him then, that boy who was beginning already to be a hero like the one you read of on the rug. To have been in his storming-parties, his forlorn hopes, would have brought the blood to your cheeks and the fire to your eyes.

There was that little affair of—Balaklava, I think it was—or Pickett at Gettysburg, I've forgotten which he said, but it does not matter. It was in the back yard anyhow, and it was just before the charge.

"Cookie," said he, "are you ready?"

"Ay, ay, sir," Cookie said, tightening his belt.

"We're not in a *boat*, Cookie," said the hero.

"I mean, 'Yes, sir.'"

"You mean, 'Ready to the death!'"

"Ready to the death!" said Cookie, fumbling at his belt.

"Cookie, my lad," said the hero—and there was an awful calmness in his face as he laid his hand on Cookie's shoulder-strap—"be a soldier, Cookie."

Said Cookie:

"You bet I will!" and then, more radiantly, remembering—"Ready to the death!" and fairly teetered for the charge.

But the hero held him with his brooding eye.

"Cookie," he said, as they waited on the heights for the bugle's blowing, "Cookie, we may never see each other again."

Cookie started.

"If you are spared and I am taken, Cookie, I want you to tell my mother how I died."

Cookie paled.

"R-ready to the death!" he chattered, but his eyes were wild.

"And if I am spared," said the hero, without a tremor in his voice, "and you, Cookie, should be the bloody one—"

Cookie sniffled — sniffled, the coward! like a baby, and with one horrid stare at the valley of death below them, turned and fled, bellowing, through the clover; and stopped not, nor looked once over his epaulets till safe by his mother's door.

"Cowardy, cowardy, cowardy-custard!" roared the hero, following hotly on the deserter's track. "Come back, you, Cowardy-Cookie, Cow-Cookie, Cow-Cookie!"

But Cookie's mother, ampler to the eye and far more dreadful than many guns, sheltered her son. The hero paused.

Attack a woman?

Never!

A hero's place is fighting men.

"Forward!" the bugles blew, and he charged—alone.

VI

HERE is always that time when a boy is to be a general, just as his dream at another is to sit in a greasy cab and run a choo-choo train; and again to sail the deep blue sea—a long dream that is apt to be; and yet again to drive a delivery-wagon like other free boys who do not have to stay pent up in yards, but rattle everywhere about the town, chirruping to horses—perhaps the baker's boy, dipping, it may be, naughtily into cookie-bags behind the seat, and knocking at kitchen doors with fat mince-pies.

That is the age of assorted heroes when you put your hand into the bag and draw out a new one every morning, but there comes a time when each boy chooses for

himself the sort of hero he is really and truly always going to be. So it happened that in the town beyond the jug, to the boy who told Aunty Sniffin, to the one whose champing charger waited at the door, there came a vision so new and wondrous in his sight, the sword dropped from his fingers, falling so softly it was never missed, and still lies rusting where it fell.

Across the way lay a great yard, streets on every side of it—a mighty square of green velvet spotted with gold between the trees. There were oaks there and beeches, elms and evergreens, a quiet forest inhabited by birds and squirrels, and one lone man in corduroys raking leaves. Often the boy watched him through the high iron fence, but the man kept raking —swish! swish!—never once looking up, never once smiling, till raking farther and farther backward from the bars with those cheeks between, he grew smaller and quieter in the distance and disappeared among

the trees. Just to look at him ever raking there—swish! swish!—you would have thought him dumb; but a boy named Bugg — for short, called Tumble-bug — once climbed the fence, and the man said,

"Hi!"

And young Bugg jumped; so it was known that the man could speak.

In the sunny centre of the square was a huge house, almost a palace, though not so bright. It was built of a dark-brown, prison-colored stone, with a high, square tower tipped by a gilded vane, and there must have been a hundred windows, though never a face looked out of one. Many a time, on his school-way, the boy, passing that great gate, gazed up the gravelled driveway, but all was silent at the other end, and grim. The lace curtains hung motionless at the tall windows; beyond them, always, all seemed black as night, even in clearest day, so that he wondered what they did within there

who kept so still — whether in hiding, whether dead.

Once, passing alone in a windy gloaming, when there was not a glimmer of light in all that house or square, he heard a—scream! and ran. But across the street where the little houses were, the little bright ones with beaming eyes, all in a row, he breathed again.

There was his own, with a green lamp shining through the five enchanted windows in the vines, and a yellow lamp here and a yellow lamp there, so that only to pass it, as a stranger passing in the night, you would have known just where to run. And the door would have yielded to the slightest pressure of your outstretched fingers, it had grown so used to it, first swinging this way and then swinging that for a school-boy all day long.

Often he wondered if those massive doors across the way could open—surely no boy could wield them, if they did; and

then again, who was it made their brasses shine?

If a knocker hangs upon a mighty door and is all of brass, and is never dingy, but shines like gold, day after day, month after month, even in cold and wet; and if a boy watches, watches, and no one, not even a maid or a raker-man, goes near to polish it—what then? Do they do it by night? And who are *they?* Do ghosts, or witches—or skellingtons!—polish brass? Or are there housemaids so hideous to look upon that they work by dark? Or do they keep Things tied in the middle of big houses, and only let them out o' nights? *And do the Things—polish—the brass?*

That was what the boy wondered, one day in spring, when he wandered, wondering, around the square. He had started at the driveway gate. He had kept to the right and close to the fence, stopping a moment now and a moment then to peer through the iron bars. Aside from

the flutter of leaf or wing, all was silent in the sun—the great, brown house silentest of all. Side and rear, its windows stared at him through the trees, but not a curtain trembled. There was not a sign of expression in those great, cold, glassy eyes. Not the faintest haze rose from the tall chimneys where the ivy clung. Behind the house the stables, too, were sleeping with lids shut tight; not a single line for a shred of wash-day rag to hang upon; not a single milk-pan drying and shining by the kitchen door-way in the sun, and nowhere a living soul, human or dog or purring pussy-cat—all dead and silent as the tomb.

Yet what was that?

Suddenly, as he neared the gate again, he heard a sound coming from—somewhere—yes—no—yes, wheels! Wheels and hoofs crunching the distant gravel!

They were coming out!

Running, breathless, he reached the gate in time. Out of it—coming appar-

ently from the very skies as at the waving of some génie's wand—dashed coal-black shining steeds, gnashing their bits, their harness jingling with silver chains, their hoofs rattling like castanets on the stone pavement, and behind them, perched high as on a mantel-shelf, two ornaments in blue and white, porcelain or wood for aught that eyes could see, and stiff and motionless as the gilded ones on circus-wagons where the brass bands play. But, ah! behind them and below in that great, black, rocking-cradle slung on wheels, leaning back grandly among the purple cushions, a man, gray, white-vested, his set face looking straight before him, his gloved hands toying with a gold-tipped cane; and by his side a lady glistening in silk and lace, her cheeks like cream and rose-leaves—and wonderful for kisses if one dared!

Not till the carriage in one wondrous moment had almost passed him, standing wide-eyed, wide-mouthed there by the

gate, did he see that vision on the little seat—the little seat opposite—probably a hassock, he thought afterward to himself, for he, too, had ridden in carriages—livery ones, surreys mostly, on bright Sundays, when they all went riding, the whole family, and made room in front for a hassock with a little boy.

There she sat on the little seat opposite—the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. She was like a fairy, oh, my Barbara, and all in white, and with silken curls falling from her broad-brimmed, feathered hat to her shoulders, and lace falling from her shoulders to her lap. And there she sat with her gloved little hands folded, and her face all pensive and cream and rose-leaves like her mother's face, and her eyes all starry bright—and that was all; for like a fairy she had come and like a fairy she was gone again.

She had not seen him standing by the gate. He stood there even after she had disappeared in the farthest distance of

lower Chaffinch Street. Perhaps they would come back for something, he thought wistfully, but suddenly remembered that if they had forgotten anything they could buy another to use while they were gone.

VII

HEY must have come back again that day, pompous and beautiful as before, passing swiftly with those prancing steeds, and — wonder of wonders! — those precious figures still unbroken on the shelf! The little boy saw them often after that, saw oftenest the woman with the little, white, golden girl by her side, saw how like a queen the mother sat in her shimmering carriage robes, how like a princess in some night Arabian sat her little girl.

Rat-a-*tat*-a-tat-*tat!*

They were there before him in the gateway.

Rat-a-tat-a, *tat*-a-tat-a—

They were gone again.

Often when they had come back and had disappeared up the speckled driveway, crunching its pebbles gloriously beneath them as they swept in state to the—French place—*you* know—with the little roof to drive under and not get wet; often then the little boy, peering through the fence, would watch long and earnestly the house which had swallowed them; would scan its windows, up-stairs and down, to see if it grew more kindly at their entering. No, you would not have known that a soul was there.

Big houses do not notice little things like souls, my Barbara. It is not well-bred to relax a cold, stone face, lest the wrinkles and crow's-feet creep upon it before their time, under the cover of too much smiling. It is only the little ones, the little houses all in a row, that watch for folk, to beam upon them as they reach the gate, and beam upon them as they enter, and beam and beam as long as they are there. They are without a thought for the wrinkles that

are to come with too much time and beaming, when they shall be old little grandmother-houses and sit and doze in the vines and the sun. Sad and sorrowful they sit when no one comes to them, not even a child after school is done; and of all who enter they love those best who climb their steps and leave there battered little toys. This you will find, my Barbara, to be true: that the more a little house beams and beams, the more little children climb its knees in the warm spring sun. See it, smiling with children! Listen, then; you will hear it singing with them too. Many a little house glows and hums all day, mothering but one.

All this the boy did not dream of then. No, only how grand and beautiful it must be within, he thought—within that house which did not deign to notice him with even a corner of any of its hundred eyes, but looked before it into space, grandly, as if nothing—nothing at all!—stood watching through the fence.

True, it was only a neighbor boy making up stories. All gold-y and like a fairy tale it was, inside that house, he told himself—silk-lined and padded, and with all soft, furry things for the little girl to play upon; for he remembered that other princess in the story-book, and the seven feather-beds on which she slept, and the pea beneath them, and the black-and-blue spot which it made, through all that seven-fold softness, in her soft, white, royal back.

The butcher's boy had been inside the fence, and had seen once with his own eyes (for his cousin was a butler) the house of a millionaire. He had seen, he said, "the pitchers on the wall—pitchers that cost a thousand dollars—oh, gee, yes, more'n that!" He had seen the rugs that "e't folks up when they was tigers!" He had seen the deer-horns, and the stuffed yet grizzly bears, and "a lot o' eagles, an' spears, an' pistols, an' armer on the wall. Gee, yes!"

"What's armer?" Cookie asked.

"Huh! Don't yer know what armer is?"

"No."

"Huh! Why, say, I seen one pistol so big, one shot 'd kill ten burglars to once—oh, more'n that. Gee, yes."

"And do they ever shoot it any more?" asked a major-general.

"Gee, yes."

"Does it make a big noise?"

"Well, you ought to hear it. You'd think it made a big noise, I guess."

"How big, Dan?"

"Gee, yes."

"Dan, how big a noise does it make?"

"Why, say, the last time they shot it, it blew both triggers off and killed the fellow what was a-shootin' it."

"When was that?"

"Oh, I dunno. Three or four thousand years ago."

And Dan had held it in his hands!

Yes, all like a fairy tale the life must be within those walls, he thought—else why

would the little girl stay so long there? Why did she never come outside to play? There were wondrous places to play in in her great, green square; in it forest snowballs and smoke-trees and flowering currants and Japanese quinces grew, and lilacs, one bush alone of them bigger than all those lilacs, lilac and white, in his own yard opposite; and there, under all those blossoming shrubs, and under the trellised wistaria, old and gnarled, it was all like tents—tents for those who happened to be soldiers, Indian tepees for beaded braves, houses all swept and dusted by the new brooms of the wind, and to let, unfurnished, to dolls and little girls.

She could have had a new house every day to play in, that golden little girl, or a whole green, busy little town of houses all at once, in her magic forest, simply by hanging on the fence some afternoon and crying to mothers across the way:

"Come over, and bring your dolls!"

And the boys would have climbed her

trees for her, would have shot any bears that might shuffle around—and think of her valentines!

Perhaps if he watched and waited but long enough she would come some day and play there near the fence and see him peering through the bars, and tell him her first two names and ask him his. So he waited, playing by himself and watching lest she come when he was not looking and go unseen. And the days passed, but she did not come.

Wonderful, oh, my Barbara, must be the house that can hold a child in the springtime. Was it spring there, too, within those walls? Were there boughs of emerald, blossoms of milk-white pearls? Did the singing birds there build their nests, straw by straw, chirp by chirp, whir by whir—those hanging nests, golden and shining, with a cup for water and one for seed and a bone for their little brown bills?

There stood a little boy, wistful, waiting outside her fence, and on its other side all

those green things in her magic forest beckoning to him with flowered arms and making room for him underneath—just room enough for a major-general and his sword. Yet he dared not go to them. A man, remember, lurked somewhere in those leafy depths to pounce upon naughty, little, playing boys; and so he stood there—he, mind you, who was to be a hero!—and pinched his cheeks tighter between those bars and wished and wondered.

He wondered how the little girl could see them there, those tents and tepees so empty and forlorn, and those green little houses looking so lonely for dolls to shelter from the sun—how she could see them with those great blue eyes of hers and not run to them, singing, run to them swiftly with twinkling, slippered feet and tossing curls, out of the great house into the wind and the morning, to take their outstretched blossoms in her hands and smell them and tell them what she was that day—queen or fairy or little moth-

er, and, if the mother, how her children did, and which was naughtiest, and how many loaves she must bake with the morn half flown.

Yet she never went to them, and the little boy could not—so there they stood, lonely and childless and ever beckoning in the sun and wind, morn after morning, with the flowers of spring dropping, dropping—petal by petal, tear by tear.

VIII

T fell so softly it was never missed, that sword of a major-general, somewhere by the fence. After all, who could tell? For years and years there might never be another war to go to, whereas at all times one could be a millionaire.

A millionaire!

Is it not a gray-headed man with a gold-headed cane in his hand? A millionaire wears a white vest and rides in a carriage with ornaments on the mantel-shelf; a millionaire lives in a house all shut and silent, with a rose-and-cream-colored wife inside, and a little, white, golden girl; and keeps in the bank down-town, all tied in bags, *one million dollars!* — exactly one million, mind!—no more, no less.

And it is so easy to be one if you set your mind to it and follow the recipe the self-made men have left behind. First, you must be an American. You need not be born one, but you must come over if you are not. Then it is best to be very poor—the poorer the better, as every poor boy knows. Do they not tell him in school how other poor boys started—started with nothing!—"nothing, my dear young friends. Not a lovely house like yours, little boy on the front seat. Not a beautiful school-house like this one with the s-star-spangled banner floating above it. No, my dear young friends, whose bright, intelligent faces I see before me, they started with nothing and became by dint of unremitting toil . . ."

Even he was a poor boy once, that little girl's father—poorer than the boy now peering through his fence.

Then when you are poor and an American, you must buy no candy, mind, nor smoke, nor swear, but save your pennies

and obey your parents and stand one hundred in arithmetic—if you can. Sweep out an office then—sweep for your life, my boy!—till they notice how well you do it, and so, by dint of unremitting toil . . .

"Father," said the little boy who was to be one, "why weren't you a millionaire?"

Said the little boy's father, watching the smoke rings rise, "I was always so busy, son. Besides—"

"Besides what, father?"

"There's a sort of a knack about it, little boy."

Ah, but the knack is so easy! It lies in choosing what kind you will be. *He* made it in oil, that little girl's father. He would make it in what — that little boy? In what? Not oil. He would have no grease. Say, rather, sugar—*candy!* M'm, chocolate creams!

You see, my Barbara, he had the knack of it, that little boy.

"And if I do, father," he said, "I'll

give you and mother a hundred—oh, a hundred thousand dollars!"

"Good gracious, son!"

"Apiece, father."

"*Two* hundred thousand! My son, give me your hand. Thanks—thanks in advance—and good luck, my boy."

Good luck, my boy! . . . a deep, kind voice it was, years and years ago, from a chair all gorgeous with pomegranate blooms . . .

So the little boy saved his pennies, one by one, till there were seventy and three—just three and seventy, dear Barbara, he remembers well, all safe in a little, red, fretted bank with a little, white, fretted door. When the door was opened—lo! before you there stood a little blue man with a yellow tray in his hand; and you put your penny on the tray—bang! and the door went shut again. And if you shut it, peeking the while through the fretwork, white or red, you saw the little blue man passing the penny through

a yellow slot—to lie there forever more. He was an honest blue man and never kept one.

How did the little boy know?

Ah! There was a passage—subterranean—yes, *under* the bank—and three screws to it, and a screw-driver on the kitchen shelf! So the little boy knew.

He knew there were three and seventy lying there. He first knew it when he went to bed one night — he had added seven to sixty-six. He knew it next morning when he rose. Next day he remembered by the corner store — by the soda-fountain—the pleasantest way you could go to school. He remembered it when he passed the fountain on his noon way home again, seeing the lists of syrups —not surrups now—on the card in the window:

VANILLA LEMON
ORANGE PEACH
STRAWBERRY

S-strawberry! Say it again. S-strawberry! Can you not see it, Barbara, that rich, red syrup—and the fizz?—the bubbling fizz, rosy with strawberry juice!

Ah, yes, he remembered; and three and seventy less five are sixty and eight; and what is five—more or less—compared to the fizz you get?

Sixty and eight.

Sixty and eight when he went to bed that night. Sixty and eight when he rose next morn, for the little blue man was honest by night as by day. If he had gone straight home that nooning—if something had happened as he stood on the corner by the store, something in the street, a dog-fight even, or runaway; if his hat, say, had been blown by the wind—

Then he might never have seen the thing.

But all was quiet. There was nothing to look at but the thing in the window, smiling upon him. Can wood smile?

Yes, when it is a bat—a ball-bat, say, marked Dandy, and not such another in the school. It smiled on the little boy who was to be a hero—or, rather, a millionaire.

And it only cost fifty cents!

Yet, if one is ever to save his money . . . still, think of the bargain! Was it not a Dandy? Did it not say so itself? Did not the other boys say so?—and to-morrow—suppose it were gone?

And yet, again, if one is to save his money, one must begin—sometime.

So be it: sometime, then.

"Dear God," he said—that night, it was; said it impulsively, not on his knees, but standing, alone in his room, hands by his side, heels together, as he somehow fancied one facing his accuser should—"dear God, let's begin all over again."

So they did—with just eighteen cents between them in the little, red, fretted bank—and now that the ball-bat was out of the way (standing in the corner, it was,

all ready and waiting for the morning bells)—now that the ball-bat was behind him, the way would be easier, somehow, and sweeter, would it not?

IX

HAT became of the eighteen cents no one knows but the little blue man, gone like themselves this many a year. He was honest as ever to the end, though rather less blue as time went on, and was last seen upon a garret stair. The bank was empty, but he still stood there with his tray in his little iron hands.

They began all over again, God and that dreaming boy. He has told me often of the day—of the wonderful, roaring, dancing day when he swallowed twice to his former once, for they had found a place for him—to sweep, as it were, and rise in its golden dust by unremitting toil.

Down-town in an office they gave him

a desk, just big enough for his littleness, by the door, and there he sat, and went at their bidding and came at their calling, and every Saturday stopped at a window for a June-colored bill. And he swept so well—we will call it sweeping—that they noticed him by-and-by, just as the self-made men had said, and came and told him, and gave him a desk to fit his bigger-ness, and farther from the door. And so, dear Barbara, he began to be a hero as he had planned, a little faster even than he had hoped, and you should have heard him whistle then and seen him smile.

Why, even the little, white, golden girl, grown tall and rosier, creamier, more like a princess every day, though she sat no longer on the — hassock, was it not?— even she could not make him envious any more. Would he not rise as her father had, and leave, ere long, the little gray-blue house with its vines and sparrow-nests and its pomegranate chairs?

Would he not build him a house like her father's house, in a great, green square? Ay, one of these days, they would gild a cane for him and he would ride behind prancing horses and statuettes. One of these days he would say, proudly:

"Father, you have worked long enough. Come, you shall wear a white vest. Mother, dearest, take off your thimbie. You will strain your eyes. Keep them to gaze proudly on your son."

How he would make them love him then! It would be so easy with the bags all filled down-town.

"Mother," he would cry, taking her face, soft as velvet, between his hands—"mother, just wait . . ."

And then she would smile at him through her glasses, the smile that a mother smiles at her little boy grown big enough to lift her in his arms.

"Will I have time to finish this slipper first, my son?"

And would knit on, smiling.

"Father," he would cry, his young face glowing, pacing that little room of books and memories—"father, just wait . . ."

"Good luck, my boy."

Always "Good luck, my boy!" . . . that deep, kind voice from a chair all gorgeous with pomegranate flowers. And a hearty way with him he had, even then when his steps lagged, for he had toiled, toiled unremittingly, all day long, all through his years, and was not a hero—but only, as one might say, my Barbara, a nice, uncle-y, goodman.

* * * * *

"Are you asleep, Uncle Jerry?"

"N-no," I said, reaching for the tobacco-jar, "I was only thinking."

"What were you thinking of?"

"Something or other. Nothing much."

"Uncle Jerry!"

"What, my dear?"

"Uncle Jerry, you were asleep."

"I was not asleep."

"Uncle Jerry *Down!*" cried my niece, pursing her lips.

"I was not asleep," I repeated, firmly.

"But your eyes have been shut ever so long."

"Can't you think with your eyes shut?" I demanded, filling my pipe. Now, no man likes to be caught sleeping, though I don't know why, I am sure. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Still—I had not been sleeping.

"Uncle Jerry," said my niece, putting her hands on my knees and shaking her head in my face accusingly, "you haven't been making a sin-gle sound."

"My dear young lady," I replied, striking a match, "that doesn't prove anything. Look out, or I'll burn your nose."

"Oh, Uncle Jerry!" said my niece, sadly, and—pff!—blew out my light.

"Come back if you dare!" I cried, but she did not dare.

"Just see the moonlight," she said,

kneeling on the window-seat and peering through the vines.

"It's my pipe-light you see," I said, rising, and stood by the windows at her side.

"Don't you wish that you lived in the big house, Uncle Jerry?"

"No," I said. "It isn't anything to what it used to be."

"What did it used to be?"

"A whole palace, five times as big."

"Did they cut it down, Uncle Jerry?"

"No. It just shrank," I said. "And you ought to have seen the trees there then, when I was a boy."

"Well, *they* couldn't have been any bigger," said my niece.

"They were bigger."

"Fudge, Uncle Jerry! What do you take me for?"

"Fudge yourself!" I cried. "They were five times as tall."

"The trees were?"

"The trees."

"What—those trees?"

"Those very same identical trees, I tell you. And there were five times as many of them, too—a whole green forest."

"Oh, they cut them down, I suppose," said my niece, "for firewood."

"They did nothing of the sort."

"Well, land's sake, Uncle Jerry, what did happen to those trees?"

"Why, some got shorter, and some just naturally went away."

"Went away!" cried Barbara.

"Yes," I replied, "went away—of their own accord."

"Uncle Jerry," said my niece, "you talk like a fairy tale."

"Tut!" said I, and turned to my chair again.

"Miss, that's my seat."

"Say Pretty, please."

"Pretty Please nothing!" I cried, hotly. "You have my—"

"Aha! You said it! You said it!" she cried, and bounded up again. "Take

your old chair, Uncle Jerry. It's all wobblety, anyhow. See how the arm—"

"Barbara!" I cried, sharply, "take care! There isn't another chair like that in the whole world."

"I should think not," she replied, scornfully. "It's a disgrace to the house."

"Disgrace!" I cried.

"Yes," said my niece, calmly, "I'd put it in the attic if I were Aunt Kate."

"I'd like to see you put it in the attic!"

"Well, I'd have it covered, then. What are those funny old faded flowers, anyhow?"

"Funny old faded flowers!" I cried, and could have boxed her ears for her idle chattering.

Funny old faded flowers!

They were pomegranate blooms.

X

"IT doesn't seem possible," my niece continued, "that you could ever have been a little boy in this very room, Uncle Jerry."

"Any more than it seems likely that you may be a little old lady here one of these days, sitting in that very chair."

"I can't imagine myself old," said Barbara.

"Nor I, my dear. I suppose I shall always think of you as a child."

"But I'm not a child any longer. You forget I'm—"

"Almost a young lady then," said I.

"And if ever I am an old lady," she went on, evidently not quite convinced that she ever would be one, "and if I come

here to this little room, I wonder if I'll remember this very time, Uncle Jerry—you sitting there and I here, and the green lamp and the books and all?"

"Maybe," said I.

"Just think, Uncle Jerry—*me*, with two little gray curls!"

"Very likely, my dear."

"How funny!"

"Odd, isn't it?"

"And kind of s-hivery!"

"So?"

"Yes. I don't like to think about sad things—getting old and all like that."

"Getting old?" said I.

"Oh, I hate black things!"

"Is getting old black?"

"Yes—and gray around the edges."

"So it is," said I, running my fingers through my hair.

"Oh, I like bright things," cried my niece, "and laughing. I know a woman who has the loveliest laugh, all silvery and like running up a scale. I think I'll

take music-lessons, Uncle Jerry, to learn how to laugh."

"Not a bad idea," I admitted; "but I fancy the music is in her soul, my dear."

"M'm," she assented, absently. "And I'll have my room bright, too, all my life—pink, I think. It's funny, though—now this room isn't what you'd call bright, Uncle Jerry, with so many old rattletrap, faded chairs and sad-colored books around, and tobaccoey things — yet it always seems bright, somehow."

"Yes," I acknowledged, gazing about me and squinting at those old familiar friends. In a moonish sort of way, year after year, I had gone on regarding them as gay as ever they were when we were young together. "How do you account for it?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied.

"Is it the grate fire, do you think, with the old blue tiles around it?"

"Partly," she admitted, "and partly

the tall little windows, all in a row; but there's something else, Uncle Jerry."

"There are some twinkling faces on the shelves," I suggested.

"Y-yes, but a lot of dull ones, too."

"Well, take the tobacco smoke," said I, blowing rings. "It's a lovely, lightish kind of blue, when you come to notice it."

"M'm," said Barbara, as if she had barely heard.

"It's wonderful," I mused aloud, "but there is something in the very air of this little room as if it were never left alone; as if some of us were always here, or at least had just run out a moment and would be back again."

"I suppose that's because we leave things around so," said my niece, glancing at her book upon the rug.

"By George!" said I, "I believe you've hit it, Barbara. We do leave things around considerably, don't we?"

"So Aunt Kate says."

"Yes," I replied, vaguely remembering

a word or two I had heard upon the subject; "so she does."

I noticed then the quaint—er—artistic arrangement of my pipes about the place, so that wherever I might chance to roam there, one or another of them seemed always handy.

"I try to pick things up," said Barbara.

"Oh, so do I. I pick things up," I replied. "Then I—I lay them down again. One can't be always carrying them about with him, you know."

"That's so," said Barbara.

"I do leave a kind of trail behind me," I confessed.

"That's what Aunt Kate says."

"So?"

"I think she's very patient, Uncle Jerry."

"Patientest little woman that ever lived."

"She doesn't nag one," said Barbara.

"Marvellous little woman, your Aunt

Kate, and one of the few I have ever known who leaves a man's things where he can find them."

"That's apt to make the room mussy, though," said Barbara.

"Nonsense!" quoth I. "A purely feminine point of view."

Then for a time we were both silent. She was leaning back in her chair with her hands folded in her lap and the firelight fondling her young, sweet face—just such a face as you meet mornings when the bells ring.

"My dear," said I, "a happy room is like a rose-jar, don't you think?—full of all the fragrant little flowery things that ever happened there. Even this little room—"

"Is like a tobacco-jar, Uncle Jerry," she interrupted me, for she is younger than she thinks, that niece of mine.

"My dear," said I, reprovingly, "you forget that tobacco is good for flowers."

"And this little time we're having now,

Uncle Jerry—will it go into the rose-jar, do you think?"

"Doubtless," said I. "I hope we have added a petal or two to-night."

Barbara pondered.

"At last," I told myself, gazing at her pensive face so full of poetry in the fire-light—"at last she has caught the spirit of the thing."

"Well—" she said.

"Yes," I encouraged her, gently, lest I break the spell.

"I'll have the carpet pink, too," she said.

XI

NYWAY," she told me, "I can't imagine this room without you, Uncle Jerry."

"It got along very nicely without me once," I replied, "and will again. Somebody else's uncle felt very much at home here, I dare say, before my time. My father sat in this very chair, reading and smoking, and I played marbles here by the grate and bumped his knees, and made him lose his place with a lot of questions; and now—"

"Now," said Barbara, "it is you sitting and smoking and reading in the arm-chair, Uncle Jerry, and I a-bothering you."

"Well, I shouldn't say 'bothering,' my dear. But, you see, if this room could talk—"

"Just think!" cried Barbara. "What is the most wonderful thing that ever happened here, do you suppose, Uncle Jerry?"

"Ah?" I replied.

Then she lowered her voice, glancing over her shoulder at the windows so white with moonlight it seemed as if the room were open to the world and night. She shuddered, and hugged herself.

"A m-murder, do you suppose, Uncle Jerry?"

"Good gracious, no!" said I. "I hope not, my dear. I shouldn't like to even dream of such a thing."

"Or a love-affair!" suggested my niece, who, by-the-way, considers *The Abbe Constantine* the loveliest book in the whole little room.

"M'm—very likely, my dear," I replied, more cheerfully, gazing at the five enchanted windows in the vines. "It is a very sentimental little room, in a way, and love affairs are sometimes very wonderful."

"With a beautiful girl in it," said my niece, also glancing at the windows.

"By all means," said I. "A beautiful girl with dark-brown hair and dark-brown eyes."

"Blue eyes, Uncle Jerry

"M'm — well, don't you think brown eyes go better with the room?"

"Oh, blue are so romantic, Uncle Jerry. They're in most of the songs, you know."

"They rhyme with True," said I. "But you must remember that it is a question of what colored eyes she *did* have—not what she *ought* to have, my dear."

"I don't understand, Uncle Jerry."

"Why, this girl is supposed to be one who actually did live in this very room, is she not?"

"Yes, but how do you know her eyes were brown, Uncle Jerry?"

"True," said I. "I never thought of that. Somehow they seemed brown to me."

"But as long as we don't *know* what color her eyes were, Uncle Jerry, why—"

"Why, of course," I assented, "we can make them blue, my dear."

"And she had a dimple," said my niece.

"Oh yes; two of them," I replied, heartily. "Two of the prettiest dimples you ever saw, when she laughed — one right here, and one right *here*. They're gone now."

"Gone now?" asked my niece.

"Why, yes. You would never—there I go again, supposing things. Still—now this girl, as I understand it, must have been here quite a long while ago. So her dimples, don't you see, must be gone by this time."

"But we're only thinking of her as she was then, Uncle Jerry."

"True," said I. "Proceed, my dear."

"She had two dimples then, and a ta-ll, willowy form," said my niece. "A tall, willowy—"

"On the contrary," said I, "she was

short and plump. Short and plump, my dear."

"Oh, do you think so?" asked my niece, regretfully.

"Think so! Know so! She just came up to my—that is to say, as I see her now as she was then, she was just about as tall as my—shoulder is now, my dear."

"Y-yes," said my niece, grudgingly, "but as long as we don't *know* that she was dumpy—"

"I didn't say dumpy. She was *not* dumpy—not at all dumpy. Short, yes—and plump—but not dumpy, my dear. I don't see her dumpy, at all."

There are words I hate. Dumpy is one of them.

"Well," said my niece, "as long as we don't know she was short and fat then, why not make her willowy. It's lots nicer."

"To be tall and willowy!"

"Oh yes, Uncle Jerry—for a heroine."

"Well, just as you say, of course. It

doesn't make any particular difference, I suppose, only in my experience the short ones are much the cosier to have around."

"All right, then—just as you say, Uncle Jerry."

"Oh no—have it your own way, my dear."

"But I don't much care, Uncle Jerry, I—"

"No, have her tall, Barbara," I replied, generously, "—tall and willowy as you please—six feet, if you like—a regular grenadier."

"And her name," said Barbara, "was Madelaine."

"Um," said I, "well—"

"Oh, I think Madelaine is beautiful!" cried my niece, earnestly.

"To be sure," said I, "but—"

"And it's so proud and haughty, Uncle Jerry."

"Y-yes, but *was* she proud and haughty, do you think? Are short and plump people apt to—"

"But we said she was tall and willowy, Uncle Jerry."

"Proceed, my dear."

"And *his* name, Uncle Jerry, was—what?"

"*His* name?"

"Yes; her lover, you know."

"Oh. Well—say, Billy."

"Oh, not Billy!" cried Barbara. "Not such a common name. Call him—"

"What?" said I.

"I like—Augustus, pretty well, Uncle Jerry."

"H'm — Augustus," I mused. "But don't you think — isn't it — doesn't it strike you that it's a—lee-tle bit big and formal, my dear, for such a common little room?"

"Oh, that doesn't make any difference," said Barbara, "in a story."

"That's so," said I. "Call him Augustus then—in the story. Well?"

"Well," said Barbara, who, I was beginning to suspect, had visions of authorship,

"they were here in this very room, long, long ago."

"Long, long ago," I repeated approvingly.

"And Madelaine," said my niece, "was arranging the flowers here on this very table."

"True!" I cried. "Her arms were full of lilacs."

"Roses," said my niece.

"Lilacs," said I. "There are so many in the yard, you know."

"All right," said Barbara, "lilacs then. Madelaine was arranging the lilacs daintily—"

"Of course—daintily," I assented.

"In a quaint, old-fashioned jar," said my niece, her face glowing.

"Sure," said I. "And do you know what that jar was, Barbara Jane?"

"No—what?" asked my niece, as patiently as possible.

"An old butter-crock," said I. "Yes, sir, it was an old butter-crock. There

wasn't a vase in the whole house big enough for lilacs."

My niece looked at me suspiciously.

"Uncle Jerry," said she, "I'm afraid you're mixing up things."

"Mixing up things?"

"Yes. This is a love-story, you know."

"True," said I, "but can't you have a butter-crock in a love-story?"

"It would be a little odd, Uncle Jerry, to say the least."

"I suppose it would," said I. "Yes, I suppose it would. And was—er—Gustus here, too, fixing the lilacs?"

"Oh yes, he was sitting in your very chair."

"I see. And she was saying—?"

"That's just the point. What was she saying?" queried my niece, wrinkling her brow.

"What would she naturally be saying, do you think?" I asked.

"Suppose you tell it, Uncle Jerry."

"But I'm not much of a hand at stories."

"Try, anyhow," said she.

"I take it," said I, "that she would be saying something about the flowers—er, like this, for instance. 'Oh—oh—'"

"Augustus," prompted my niece.

"Thanks. 'Oh, Augustus'—no. No, my dear, that doesn't sound right, somehow."

"But his name *was* Augustus, Uncle Jerry."

"Y-yes, but wouldn't she call him Gussy—or something like that—for short, you know?"

"Gussy! Horrors, Uncle Jerry!"

"Well—Gusty, then."

"Mercy, Uncle Jerry!"

"Or even Augie," I suggested.

"Don't be silly! Madelaine would call him Augustus."

"So she would. You're right, my dear. I forgot her name was Madelaine. In that case she would say, 'Oh, Augustus,' of course—'Oh, Augustus, we shall be so happy now in this little—'"

"But she would be married to Augustus then, if she said that," my niece protested.

"Oh yes," I said. "Of course. Married. Married on a Thursday. Rainy in the morning, but just at the ceremony the sun came out. It was beautiful—beautiful, my dear. Yes, they were married, and—er—Gustus had brought her home to this very room to live till they bought a bigger one."

"Oh," cried my niece, "but I thought this was going to be a love-story!"

"So it is, my dear."

"But I thought a love story was *before* you get married!"

"Well, so," said I, "it is—sometimes. But not always, my dear. It wasn't in this case."

"But how are you going to make any love-scenes then?"

"Why, easily enough. Here stood the beautiful girl arranging the lilacs in the butter-crock."

"Yes," said my niece, "but—"

"Right in the butter-crock," I insisted, firmly, "and she said—what we've said she said, you know.

"Yes—'Oh, Augustus.' Go on, Uncle Jerry."

"Well, then, said she, 'Oh, there were some of the loveliest lilacs by the window —er—Gustus, but I couldn't reach them.'"

"But she *could* have reached them."

"Why, no she couldn't. What are you talking about?"

"Why, Uncle Jerry, she was tall and—"

"All right," said I. "All right. You tell the story."

"Oh, go on, Uncle Jerry."

"No. No, I—I simply can't imagine a tall, willowy female a-prowling around this room. It isn't natural, my dear."

"Well, make her stumpy then, Uncle Jerry."

"Stumpy! Stumpy!" I cried. "Not at all. Who said she was stumpy? Would you call your aunt Kate—for instance—for example—stumpy?"

"Aunt Kate! Mercy, no!" cried Barbara. "She's too sweet and cuddly for anything."

"Exactly," I cried. "That's what I say. That's what *she* was — this here— Madelaine. Cuddly, I think you said?"

"Cuddly," said my niece.

"Cuddly, as you say," I repeated, "and sweet."

"And then, Uncle Jerry?"

"Where was I? I've lost my place."

"She couldn't reach the—"

"Oh yes; so he reached them for her, you see."

"And then?"

"*Well*," said I, warming to my theme, now that the tall and willowy business was out of the way and I could see the picture, plain as it were, before my very eyes, "there she stood by that very table there with her arms full of lilacs, and—er —Gustus sitting here in this very chair. Why, I can see her now. And says she:

"'I love these old, flowery chairs and

books and things because you played here when you were only a little boy — er— Gustus, before I knew you.'

"And says he, 'M'm.'"

"Not '*M'm*,' Uncle Jerry!"

"Well, that was the gist of it, my dear. I've forgotten the words. And then says she—for she was always so enthusiastic from the first—says she:

"'If only we can keep our hearts young—er—Gustus!' she cries, sitting on the arm of that very chair there" (I had risen to complete the tale). "'See! Even an old butter-crock is young with lilacs in it. If only we can keep flowers in our hearts, always!'

"'The flower of youth,' says I—er—Gustus, fondling her hair, for she was mighty pretty, I tell you, with her big, brown eyes and the bloom on her cheeks so rosy it was hard to pass them.

"'We *will* keep young,' says she.

"'Oh yes,' says he, lightly enough, for their life, he thought, was all before them;

it didn't occur to him that it was mostly right then and there. 'Oh yes,' says he.

"I forgot to say it was a Sunday morning, and the windows were open, and the flowers outside, and the flowers inside, you know—well—"

"Is that all, Uncle Jerry?"

"Mm," said I.

"But where's the plot?"

"The what?"

"The plot," said she.

"Do you have to have a plot?" said I.

"Oh yes," said she, "always—in a story."

"True," said I. "I forgot—in a story."

XII

HEN as we sat there dreamily it came to me how like the Kate of other days she was. It was not her eyes or mouth or cheeks, nor yet the color of her hair, but altogether that grace of girlhood, that flowerness, so lovely that I never pass it even in the public thoroughfare without an inward smiling.

We never had a little girl—so once a year they loan us Barbara. Ruling my lap by right of conquest, she queens it over me till only love for me remains—no awe any longer, scarce reverence it may seem to some, but she tells me in a thousand ways that next to Kate I am her favorite of relatives. To be next in love to Kate is love enough for me. To be

prized so highly by one who dotes on that Young Pretender should be honor enough for any uncle-y sort of fellow with his youth behind him.

If I have lost her awe I have gained her confidence—a rarer jewel, for by its rays I have caught such glimpses of a girl's heart as should make me the better man for it. So when she talks to me I do not jest too much, but listen gravely, even when I fain would laugh—and then learn often, to my surprise, what is no laughing matter.

That which is now so rosy in Barbara's heart I still find fragrant in the heart of Kate, and love it so that I would have all girls not grow up too much. Still, I am scarcely the guide, I know, for a strenuous age like this. They all tell me I have a weakness for tender things. The men folk smile sometimes behind my back, and even Barbara points out to me the errors in my philosophy.

My niece arose.

"I won't wait up for Aunt Kate and the boys, I guess," she said, yawning.

"Good-night, my dear."

"Good-night," she said, and kissed me sweetly.

"I'm so disappointed in the book I was reading," she remarked, standing in the doorway. "It began so beautifully and turned out so sad."

"Ah, yes," said I. "Poor Charley!"

"I think it was mean!" said Barbara, fiercely. "He was so young and handsome, and everybody loved him."

"Yes," I replied, "even the young and handsome are disappointed now and then."

We were both silent.

"Well," said Barbara, "good-night, Uncle Jerry."

"Good-night, my dear."

"I suppose," she added, still lingering in the doorway, "if he had been old I shouldn't have cared so much."

"Quite likely," I replied—"if he had been old, say, and uncle-y."

"I've noticed often," said Barbara, who seemed to be lost in her own half-sleepy thoughts, "that even in the nice and happy books the first part, somehow, always seems the best."

"True," said I.

"But if ever *I* write a book," she declared, with feeling, "I'll be very careful to scatter the young things—flowers and love-scenes and all like that—way to the end. In fact—"

"Yes?"

"In fact," she confided, a little self-consciously, though even that is not unbecoming in so young a girl, "I have started one, Uncle Jerry."

"A book?"

"Um."

"A novel?"

"Yes. I've written the first chapter."

"In-deed! and what is it about?" I asked.

"I call it," she replied—"now you mustn't laugh, Uncle Jerry."

"Never!" I swore.

"Well, the name is—I've named it *Lady Madelaine's Secret.*"

"A-ah! And the secret?"

"Well—that's the secret. "It would be telling, Uncle Jerry. Wait till it's done. Oh, it has a lovely plot!"

"I'll warrant," said I.

"It's a love-story," my niece confessed.

"Naturally," said I.

"I—I didn't mean, Uncle Jerry, to criticise *your* story, but you see you really do have to have a plot. Now a love-story is where two persons fall in love very much, but somebody—their parents or their guardians, or maybe a rich old relative—well, anyway, somebody or something, won't let them. That's the plot."

"Ah, yes," said I, "it is now quite plain to me."

"And a love-scene," my niece continued, "is where they've slipped away, you know—from a ball or something, and meet on the terrace."

"The terrace," I mused—"why, of course, my dear."

"Or some other place where roses are," she told me.

"But wouldn't—wouldn't strawberries do as well?"

"Oh no, Uncle Jerry—strawberries! The idea!"

"Well," I continued, "there are strawberries and strawberries."

"I know," said Barbara, "but roses, Uncle Jerry—"

"Suppose," I interrupted her—"suppose there were *wild* roses among the strawberries?"

"But they're not double, Uncle Jerry."

"No," I admitted, "they are single, to be sure; but are the roses in novels always double, my dear?"

Barbara reflected.

"All that I ever read about," she said.

"Well, then," I declared, firmly, "if I ever write a book, I'll stick little pink

single roses into it, and strawberries here and there."

"The idea!" she laughed. "How funny! I'm afraid you'll never make an author."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Uncle Jerry," she said, beaming upon me indulgently from the topmost tip of youth, "you're a dear, but you're not one bit romantic."

"Mm!" said I.

"And you have to be awfully romantic to be an author, you know. Oh, I think you'll like my book, Uncle Jerry."

"I am sure of it," I replied, warmly. "I want to see it the moment it is done."

"Well," she said, softly, her eyes shining so that I knew they saw a terrace somewhere, "good-night, Uncle Jerry."

"Good-night, my dear."

Well, she was right, that niece of mine. There was no plot to it—and without one how shall a man find a story in his love?

When an uncle-y goodman looks back-

ward what does he see? Is it a terrace scented with double roses and white with moonlight? Does he hear there the music of violins?

Think of it — only a few pink single roses, pale stars among the strawberry vines of a country lane! Moonlight, yes —and a little music of a quiet sort: drowsy twittering of birds and wind in tree-tops, and, it may be, a brook tinkling. But you could not dance to it; you could only stroll to it, mostly silent, or sit somewhere upon a stile, listening.

One slip of girl, she was, among a score I knew, but had about her that which made me wish she would look my way. It all began with a boy sharpening a girl's pencils for her and handing them back to her across the aisle. The lane was a short cut home for her after school, and the long way around was the shortest way home— for me.

They shook gray heads at us, we were so young. So, thanks to a common peril,

they drove all doubt away. Comrades at arms we were in a noble cause. We unfurled love's banner—two doves, I believe, white upon an azure field; raised our fair standard in Beecher's Lane—and annexed the world. It was a bloodless victory.

The town has spread since Kate and I walked in the lane together. It is all houses and asphalt now, and they call it Seventh Street. Where all is gray, then all was green. Where sparrows chatter, thrushes sang. Where cows stood lowing by the bars on summer evenings, children play now on the stone steps—not children like the barefoot boy who was to be a hero, whose hair stuck up through a hole in his torn hat, but clean, pretty little children, shoed and stockinged and dressed in white, and some with nursemaids to hold their hands for them. Suppose they should make mud-pies! Mary Ann, preserve us! What, then, of those little white suits?

But there is not enough clean, sweet dirt in all Seventh Street to make a pie of —a proper pie, my Barbara, such as they baked in the sun in Beecher's Lane. Oh, the lane-y pies were proper pies, I tell you!—pleasant to roll, to sprinkle, to mark on their upper crusts with the sign of the tree, and set in the oven of the summer-time till they were done. They left their traces, it is true, but if you played in a green lane long enough and were not Called In, its little winds were as towels and brush brooms. Street dirt smuts and sticks. Lane dirt dries and crumbles and goes back to its element. The cleanest dirty boys in all the world play in lanes.

Now the lane is gone, and they did not even preserve its name. Seventh Street! Think of the questions were it still called Beecher's Lane! Who was this Beecher who had a lane? Then some old codger would tell its tale, a bit of history of a bit of town—how young man Beecher

hewed and dug in the forest wilderness, and served his God there, and his country and his state, and raised his sons; and how, at last, old man Beecher would be seen walking on sunny mornings, leaning on his cane, on the paved and very spot where his cows had grazed.

Pshaw! He is dead and gone, and buried, like his lane. Old fossil, I think they called him in his later years—always talking of how the land lay when he was young. He had helped to build a town, it is true—but Seventh Street is so convenient! It tells so plainly how it runs—yes, between Sixth and Eighth!

No, you would not dream, my Barbara, to look at Seventh Street, that rose and strawberry vines had ever blossomed there; nor do you dream that youth once blossomed in the heart, say, of an uncle-y goodman.

The sun still rises and burns there all day long in Seventh Street, but without a pie to bake; the moon still shines and

lovers pass there on the stone walks beneath the maples, mumbling lest you catch some word of the old story. It was all different when the turf was soft and the thrushes sang and only the night winds passed you with the scent of woods and meadows and the sound of leaves.

Hill-sides, long since levelled, then starred with daisies, hid the world of men, and two could walk there in the world of God, where love grows wild as any flower. Young hearts find each other quickest in a lane. There simple words seem best, and even silence has a voice when two are listening.

First, I remember, it was as March there, and all uncertainty—now blast of winter, now breath of spring; then a kind of—April, with violets and rue anemones where the snow had been. How shall one say the hour when they bloomed? And without the hour and word and plot, how, indeed, shall one make the love-scenes?

I cannot remember—I cannot remem-

ber the words we spoke, we have spoken so many since. I do remember sitting on a stile, and a frock Kate wore, white, and sprinkled blue with some—I think, forget-me-nots. It hit me rarely, I remember, it was woven so of May. Ever since I have liked the gowns that school-girls wear.

The stile was in the lane-side wall. An oak shaded it, and behind it the brook sang in a little glen, the stones of the ford stringing a harp for the running waters. Birds! Why, the woods were full of them —and flowers! there are not so many any more.

There was a long hill there, waist-deep with black-eyed—what do you call them? —Susans; and then again with purple asters and golden-rod. In early spring the banks of the rivulet were yellow with adder's-tongues, and we found arbutus, I remember, under the dead leaves and the last March snows.

Thank God, I fell in love in the country!

It is pleasant for a man in town to look backward and see himself sitting on a stile in a lane, and smell again flowers and trees and hear a brook whimpering.

Sitting was pleasantest at the stile, but the lane's far end was the most beautiful. First, from the stile, the cart tracks mounted gently into the very sky, and there at evening, over that little hill, the sun went down the lane on the other side, followed slowly by the after-glow. Then as you watched you would see the hedgerows at the top blossoming with stars.

Oh, the lane was fair enough at the stile, and at the hill-top, as I say, was still more beautiful, but beyond, at its farthest end, I mean—where it could not be seen from the stile at all—we knew it was loveliest. There it was a prouder thoroughfare. There, even as I sat with Kate, with the singing brook behind us, there at the lane's far end I saw her leaning back grandly among the carriage cushions, and all glistening with silk and lace, her

cheeks like cream and rose-leaves, and wonderful for kisses if one dared!—and saw myself sitting beside her in a white vest toying with a gold-headed cane, and ornaments—our own!—upon the mantel-shelf!

For even as we haunted you, little lane, speaking doubtless of flowers and spring, with their scent about us, even as we told each other how rich we were—richer, we vowed, than the little girl grown tall and princess-like in her great, green square—we were thinking silently of the lane's far end, where by some means golden and silken and I know not what we would find happiness, counting the big, round, minted days with a pleasant chinking.

"When we get rich . . ." we said sometimes.

"When our ship comes in," we told each other, "we shall do this, and that."

Our eyes never were so bright—you, little lane, never were so beautiful with gloaming and spring-time as when we

planned there what we would have some day: more life than our fathers and mothers had, dwelling so plainly; more noise than they, more laughter, more nods and smiles and hats lifted to us in the brave, bright world outside—more love within than two folk sitting, faded, in faded chairs beside a fire.

Such is the magic of lanes when love is young, such is their rare atmosphere, you see beyond you years and years—and trample beneath your feet the pink wild roses God grows for you in your own spring-time, as you smell in fancy the hot-house ones you will grow yourself when your summer comes.

XIII

ITTLE more than a girl Kate was that rainy Thursday when the sun came out at noon, brightening the drowsy little church which we had wakened from its mid-week slumbers. We had just stepped in a moment, I remember—on our way from the berries of Beecher's Lane to the lilacs of Chaffinch Street.

Then, on a Sabbath morning with its sound of bells, she tied on a gingham apron and took down the old blue china from the pantry shelf, and set a table in a room of windows looking upon a bit of garden where a boy once wondered, would they make him dig?

I poked the fire for her and filled the

pail and pitcher at the well, and stood, now here, now there, idle, hovering aimlessly, watching her cheeks reddening in the kitchen glow.

"And can't I help?" I asked.

"You might bring a plate," she said

"What kind of a plate?"

"A plate for the toast."

So I brought her one.

"Oh, that's too small."

So I brought another.

"Oh no, Jerry, not a platter—a plate."

"I know," said I, "but I thought a platter might be better," and brought a third, at which she smiled.

"Isn't it right?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she said, "it will do nicely," and beamed upon me. How was I to know? It was round and had little sides to it, to keep the toast from sliding. Let *her* tell her tale. She cannot prove anything. The thing was broken long ago.

"Jerry," she said, peering into cup-

boards, "do you know where your mother kept the toasting-fork?"

"The toasting-fork? Why, I think—let me see—the toasting-fork."

"Maybe she used a rack," said Kate.

"A rack, yes; it was a rack. Isn't it beneath the sink?"

"No, it wouldn't be there. That's the kettle place."

"Or in the cupboard by the stairs?"

"No; I've looked."

"The toasting-rack, the toasting-rack," I repeated, vaguely—then, like a flash, remembered the very nail on which it hung. I had driven it myself.

"A little lower down, my son," she had told me. "I'm not so reachful as I used to be."

"What a queer place for it," said my wife. "I think we'll keep it there in the other cupboard."

"Mother always kept it here," said I.

The door was open. Outside in the sunny garden, with its prim little rows of

green, and its currant and gooseberry bushes and grape-vines over against the fence, the birds were busy in their nests. We were building ours under the old roof-tree.

"Think of it, Jerry!" said my wife. "Our first toast is on the fire!"

A pleasant steaming rose then near the chimney, and our first coffee scented the smoke-stained room. I had never much heeded it, but now it seemed to me a cheerful sort of place to work in. There were morning-glories by the doorway. A vagrant apple-bough, changing its mind three times, was now making for the window-sill as fast as its twigs could carry it —for the very sill where mother cooled her pies.

"See!" said I.

"Yes," said Kate. "Your mother told me once—'Kate,' she said, 'I worked there years and years by that kitchen window in the blazing sun, when the tree was a little thing, but it's cool and lovely now—for you, my dear.'"

Kate turned her face from me. She was always such a soft-hearted little thing.

"I'll call your father, Jerry," she said.

He was in the garden, a lonely figure in a knitted jacket, smoking and thinking in the Sabbath glow. Now he pulled a leaf from the gooseberry vines or bent stiffly to uproot a weed; then walked slowly in the pathway, his hands behind him, his eyes downcast, or stood quite motionless, gazing upward and away as if the sky there held some fairness he had never seen before.

Kate stood a moment in the doorway.

"Come, father," she called.

He came quietly, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"The currants will be fine this year," he said, and as he entered slipped one arm about her waist. His lips were grave, but his eyes smiled lovingly upon my bride. And so we sat down together—an oldish man in a knitted jacket and his two children who had promised to be always young.

XIV

UMMER mornings I hurried from our little world down three gray steps and a gravelled pathway edged with pinks into the great world roaring with wheels and men; at the corner turned and waved my hand, and all day long in crowded streets and above my desk a face smiled at me. Evenings I hurried back between the pinks and up those three gray steps again to the porch where honeysuckles clung, and seized the mottled, marble-y knob in the white door, just as when a boy I came in flushed from play, but knowing now that close behind it I should find a face upturned. And so, watched for every evening, I would come from the great world where

I was to be a hero to the little world where I was already one.

On a golden evening I have taken that waiting face between my hands and said,

"What do you think?"

"What?"

"Guess."

"I can't guess."

"What the manager said."

"Jerry, what did he say?"

"What might he say?"

"Tell me!"

"What would you like him to say?"

"Jerry—*no!*"

"Yes. Two dollars more! He told me to-night. Two dollars more a week, Katie! Darlin', we'll get on yet."

Then I would tell her how he told me, just where he stood when he did it, just how he looked, smiled, lighted his cigar, and left me to carry home my joy.

"We'll get on yet, Katie"—this through the suds. . . . "And, mind, if Culver is ever

head of the firm"—that through the towel. "Then—"

"Oh, the steak!" my Kate would cry, and be off kitchenward.

"Just wait, Katie," I would call after her. "There'll be some one to broil your steak for you one of these days."

"When we get rich we will have a beautiful little kitchen," she would tell me, her face radiant as she washed the dishes while I toiled manfully at her side. "All tiled, white and blue, and with pots and kettles, copper and shining, on the wall, and a little white porcelain sink to wash my dishes in."

"But you won't wash dishes then."

"True," she said, almost regretfully at the thought of the little white sink she would never use. "I forgot. That's the trouble with getting rich: you can make work beautiful then if you wish, but you won't want to work."

"You can play then, all day long. Wash on, Katie," I would cry—"did you rinse

these cups? Wash on, Cinderella. Culver is bound to be president one of these days."

"One of these days, Katie," I used to tell her when the dishes were put away and I had her all to myself again, and we stood in the windows looking at that big house, pompous and frowning, across the way, and without a blink for us—"one of these days, I'll come home to you through a big gateway, in a big carriage, and instead of this gingham you'll be wearing an all-white lace and furbelowy gown."

"I saw the Princess this afternoon," she would tell me. "All in pale-blue silk she was, and wore a great black hat with snow-white plumes. Oh, she is beautiful!"

"Just wait, my dear. Culver is sure to win, and then . . ."

"Meanwhile," she would tell me softly, with her cheek laid close to mine, "we will be happy here."

Yes, meanwhile — meanwhile, till we

were rich enough to buy the new things, we would make the old ones do. Meanwhile the old little gray-blue house would fairly shelter us till we built our new one in a great, green square; the old blue china would do to eat from in the dining-room, the old fruit-pictures could hang there a little longer, and here in the library we could use, for the time being, the old pomegranate chairs.

Meanwhile evenings we sat in this very room, three of us, father and Kate and I —everything made for words, nothing too trivial for our little narratives, our little arguments, our little jests. Meanwhile Kate sat sewing there, there father with his pipe and book, and here myself. Meanwhile the clock ticked upon the shelf, the fire spluttered upon the hearth when it was cold, and there outside lay the great world and its joys and sorrows of which we told each other — forgotten words, fleeting as the moments in which we uttered them.

Meanwhile the stars glimmered and the moon shone for us. Meanwhile the sun rose, day after day, over the house-tops in Chaffinch Street; over the pear-trees, morn after morning came to us, sweet-breathed and rosy as ever in the world before.

"Yes," we said, "for the present, it will do."

XV

"AND so meanwhile," I said aloud —half to myself I said it, half to a mother with a little boy's arms about her and his cheek pressed close to hers.

"Meanwhile," I said again.

It was only a photograph in a gilt frame, standing so near me on the table among the books that I had but to turn my head a little to find Kate's eyes and Jamie's looking into mine.

"You rogue," said I, myself half smiling.

Jamie, there, was still in curls, though already he had worn a sword. The pictured Kate was so plainly proud of him, her eyes shone so with ownership, her lips drooped so with a sweet hopelessness of ever smiling half her heart's delight—

"Do you think," I mused, for as I looked at her she seemed almost to be there beside me, "that you were ever one-half so beautiful in the lane?"

"Dear-heart," I murmured.

Once I had thought a boy's love so much more gentle than a man's could be, had thought myself a wondrous lover in the lane with a summer's evening to prompt my wooing—it is so easy to be kind where flowers are and birds and brooks are singing. So it is easy to make a story of the lane-love; you make it chiefly of the lane.

"Dear-heart," I said, and as I gazed at her, remembering, the lane-trysts seemed no more to me than a little moonlight and a dream or two, and a good many rustling leaves.

The gray-blue house was made for children. It was just little enough and viney, and having once mothered a boy who was to be a hero, it was never itself again till it grandmothered one. Then there were love-scenes with three true-lovers in them—

rare in fiction but common enough in fact —and when there were only two, they were always waiting for the third to come to them.

"My two children," I used to call them when we all played together, for Kate was always such a child herself, though twenty-three!—an age so monstrous that she sighed prettily for her lost youth, counting one gray hair and unnumbered brown.

The happier her thoughts were, the more like a child she spoke them. Often, evenings, I would hear a mumbling kitchenward and wonder who had come. Then if I listened, or tiptoed down the hallway, I would hear, perhaps, spoken as a child would say it—

"Fee-fy-fo-fum!"

—all to herself, those magic words at which Care vanished like a cloud, and lo! before her, there stood a geni called Content. To those like Kate, who recall it lovingly, childhood is a fairy wand. The

bitterest lips dare not repeat its rhymes lest they smile, remembering.

So Kate would sit on the three gray steps in Chaffinch Street with Jamie and the Pidgeon boys—who, counting girls, were seven—matching doggerel and doling cookies: round, sugared memories, one bite of which restores one's youth.

There I would find her sometimes when I came from work, and there evenings we would sit awhile, long after Jamie had gone to bed, listening to the older children playing in Chaffinch Street—tag, pull-away, and once, to our surprise, follow-your-leader over Kate's pansies, explaining that you could not be expected to see such bits of things by dark.

At nine o'clock there was a sound of calling from the porches, a noise of running here and lingering there, in the street; then like a flock of sparrows they were gone. Sometimes we talked then, sometimes were silent. If we talked less of poetry than in the lane, there was more of

it in what we said, for now it seemed to us that even the common words were lighted by a kind of glow—a glow most golden when we talked of Jamie.

"We must be careful, Kate. We are always talking of that boy up-stairs."

"Yes—dear little soul—we must remember that others are not so interested in our son. You should have seen him to-day when I brushed his hair."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, nothing—only he looked so sweet."

"And we must teach him, Kate, that he is only a child. He must not expect to be always in the centre of the stage, you know."

"No, of course not."

"Children can be intolerable nuisances to guests."

"Yes, we must be careful of that."

"It will be hard, Kate, of course—he's such a jolly little fellow."

"Isn't he a darling?"

"That's just it. He is so much prettier

and brighter than other children, we must be doubly careful."

"And he is so cunning, Jerry."

"I know, but you must guard yourself —guard yourself, my dear. All day long you have him on your mind, and when night comes with callers you must try to remember not to—"

"Jerry Down, who was it began to talk of him last night when the Pidgeons came? I made it a special point *not* to say 'Jamie' once, till you—"

"Oh, well, last night, of course; they were neighbors, and, besides, Mrs. Pidgeon was talking of children and I happened to—"

"Of course you did. You happened to remember Jamie."

"Tut! You were just waiting for me to remember."

"Why, Jerry Down, I—"

"You know you were."

"Jerry!"

"Katie!"

"Well?"

"Well?"

So we would warn ourselves against the wiles of the Other Lover asleep up-stairs lest he lead us into devious ways by his too much smiling. And there, but two of three, on the porch in those summer nights, the love-scenes seemed to lack, somehow—to need—ah well, dear Barbara, it was as if you were to write a love-scene with a terrace in it and forgot the roses.

He had made, as it were, a kind of plot for our little story—something to wonder at, something to smile at in a life all humdrum and everydays, with never a secret like Lady Madelaine's to hold the interest to the end. He was even a little—what did she call it, that girl Barbara?—a little novelish, to keep us from yawning there in the starlight. He gave us a hero who would go through fire—at the very thought Kate shuddered and was always for going up-stairs to tuck him in again—but he

would emerge, we vowed, like any other hero, triumphant in the end.

Yes, there was plot and mystery now in our little love-story; and parts to laugh at, and parts Kate called the crying places; parts where the hero smiled so winsomely Kate clapped her hands; parts where she held her breath and ran to rescue him, the plot thickening. Every day was a new chapter; every night Kate tucked him in, to be continued in our next.

* * * * *

I rose. There, through the windows in the vines, beyond the curtains, filmy and luminous as elfin veils, I saw the apple-boughs broidering the moon-bright sky, whose stars were pale. I stood for a long time motionless, gazing through the panes . . . threw Barbara's cape about my shoulders, unlatched a window, and seated myself upon the sill.

The night air mingled with the tobacco smoke, the scent of the last apples in the

grass. All was still save a little wind, rising and falling in the withered leaves, and the flutter of startled wings in the vines above me.

There at arm's-length were the lilac shrubs; beyond, the pear-tree with its limb just low enough for a leaping boy. Over the way the big house glowered, even in moonlight, in its great square.

XVI

AMIE was a red-cheeked schoolboy when our Princess came through those great iron gates, a bride. It was a gala week in the green square. Those hundred windows blazed at night. Carriages rolled up the gravelled driveway and out again. Carts lingered at the tradesmen's entrance, stuffed with baskets; workmen slipped through the alley gateway in the morning and out at night again with their bags of tools. The morning papers were full of tales—the bride was the fairest of the city's daughters, the groom the richest, handsomest of its younger sons. Kate's eyes widened as the trousseau rustled and trailed its frills through half a column of the *Herald's* gossip. With

a girl's eagerness she peeped cautiously from the windows in the vines. There were jewels sparkling in the very air!

On my way from the office I stepped into Toby's for a meditative mug of ale. It was a dusky corner where I sat in the old chop-house. A picture hung upon the wall—stage-coach, fox-hunt, or winner of some Derby: I've forgotten which — fly-specked and stained by time. Through a haze of cigar smoke I watched the drinkers at the tables, the aproned waiters flitting by like ghosts; listened to the drone of voices, gusts of hoarse laughter, splutter of chops grilling on the fire, and the clashing of pewter cups.

The door burst open. A whiff of June wind stirred the blue smoke into lazy eddies and touched my brow with its coolness, so that I turned my head.

A young stranger strode, laughing, into the room—six feet of stalwart manhood crowned by a fine, well-chiselled head, the face blooming with health and care-

less youth. There was a welcoming voice—"Chelsea!"

Like a flash I thought of those cheeks like cream and rose-leaves, and wonderful for kisses if one—

This, then, was the man who dared!

A judge made room for him; a white-bearded colonel offered a vise-like hand; a banker nodded—that whole round table beamed upon him, and men at the other tables turned their heads. Waiters hurried to his side—two took his stick, a third his hat, as he bowed familiarly to left and right, smiled, seated himself, tossed off his ale, I told myself, as a young viking his horn of mead, and straightway, easily, like one confident and so forgetful of his place and power, fell to chatting with his older friends.

His voice rose clearly from his deep-welled chest, his every pose, his every gesture, his every glance, glowing with life, were such I could not take my eyes from him. I watched with a pang of

envy in my heart. The young gods were not dead.

"Ay, look! Look long and well, poor Jerry Down," said a still, small voice, "for that, indeed, is young Captain Chelsea you hear of every day. A million if he has a penny—governor's aide—looks like the hero of an historical novel in his blue uniform—could be your mayor if he would, they say—the best horseman in the state—plays polo, golf—muscles like steel—hunts big game in the Rockies, Indian jungles, African plains—rowed, you remember (or did when you had red blood) at Yale in that famous year—known, is Chelsea, in a dozen capitals—speaks half as many tongues—loved, doubtless, by a dozen girls as fair as your golden Princess who has given him her hand! Jerry Down — Jack Chelsea. Jack Chelsea — Jerry Down."

So rattled on that still, small voice of mine, mockingly. I stared the harder at that young Adonis there—

"If Captain Chelsea," I told myself, "had been born plain Jerry Down—"

There was a roar of laughter.

"Capital!" said the colonel.

"Good! Good!" rumbled the judge.

The captain smiled, spoke rapidly to the waiter hovering about his chair—spoke in French, so that the waiter grinned and scraped, tickled to hear his native tongue again.

"If I had been born to millions—and opportunity—and gifts of God," I mused.

The captain drank, lifting his cup, as all men must who drink—lifting it, ah! but not as other men.

My heart sank, sank to the very bottom, but rose—rose!—rose again, remembering the hero I had meant to be. I felt the warm blood mounting to my cheek!—shook myself free—smiled—pushed back my frayed cuffs—straightened my bent shoulders—opened my cramped lungs to a long, full, heartsome breath—threw my head higher in the air, and crossed my

spindle legs. Then, with what little grace I fain could muster, I laid my hand to my pewter mug, minded to quaff as jauntily as any Chelsea ever dared—laid my thin, trembling hand, I say, to my brimming cup, and—

Spilled the brown liquor on my very knees!

—then listened humbly to that still, small voice again.

XVII

FTER the honeymoon Captain Chelsea and his bride came back to Chaffinch Street to dwell while he built her a fairer palace in a newer quarter of the town. We saw them often, riding together —the Princess, as we still called her, pink-cheeked and beautiful in her simple habit, the captain graceful as a cavalier. Sometimes they cantered by me on golden mornings as I walked down-town, so near that I stopped on the crossing to let them pass. Only a little fresh, sweet air lay cool between us—yet then, near as she was to me, she seemed more distant than when a boy I watched her passing, a vision on a little seat I thought a hassock, come like a fairy through

those great iron gates and like a fairy gone.

Now as she rode away, blithe and without a care but her own fairness, I would think of a woman clearing a table of its blue cups. We were still young, I told myself. What other men had done for their loves I, in time, would do for mine—yet, even as I vowed it, wondered doubtfully if life would be for me what I had planned. Where was the first stone of that bigger house I was to build for her? Where even was the first grass-blade of that new green square?

"Face the truth, Jerry," I told myself. "You are nothing but a common, every-day sort of fellow, after all your dreaming. Take your medicine. Smile, man—smile!"

I did, but it must have been a pitiful sort of thing. My neighbor Pidgeon saw it, I remember, and was concerned.

"What is the matter, Down?" he asked, clapping me upon the shoulder. "Anybody dead?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A—a hero," I said.

"A what?" said he.

"A hero, I tell you. Look here, Pidgeon, don't be frivolous; and remember this: if a man looks like a gravestone he is pretty apt to be burying something, even though it's only a little piece of his own heart."

Pidgeon looked at me.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I really do."

"We have each other, Jerry," Kate would tell me, "and we have Jamie." Her eyes were bright for me, her voice tender; but sometimes that very gentleness made me more wistful than before.

"Poets need words for their love," I said to her. "An ordinary man, somehow, needs sticks and stones for his. Katie, I would build you an epic three stories high with a perfect sonnet of a tower!"

"Then this old, little house must be a love-song—and sweet enough," was her reply. She said it as a girl, as Barbara would have said it, her eyes dancing. All her life she has had that way of saying things, things bright enough to put in a story, but with only her husband to listen and smile at them and forget. So, often, in a quiet woman's eyes I see a twinkling so eloquent I feel quite sure there must be words to it as bright that she is saving to say when she is home again.

The world was full of things I longed to give her—great, double roses, as it were, my Barbara—music and holidays and strange, new scenes and gowns to wear.

"Humpf!" I sniffed, as some proud heiress swept from a shop to her waiting carriage at the curb-stone. "If you, now, were one-half so lovely as my Kate would be in your fine flounces!"

"But it isn't gowns I need to be happy, Jerry," she would tell me.

"I know, my dear, but you would be

just as happy if you did have them, would you not?"

"I think," she said once, "I should be happier wearing them for you than for myself."

"Katie, Katie," I replied, "that's just the worst of it!"

"The worst?" she said.

"The very worst. If only, somehow, you could manage to be less deserving, my dearest dear."

Over her sewing in the lamplight's yellow glow I saw a woman's face still young and fair. There were no wrinkles, no crow's-feet yet. Her lips were red, her cheeks still round, her eyes still radiant, her step still blithe as ever in the lane, it seemed to me—yet now and then, when her long day's work was done, I thought I saw the Older Woman's face coming in that younger one.

Then I would think jealously of that broom lurking behind the door, of those kettles hanging on the wall, and that

shining china on the cupboard shelf. Silly, kitchen things they had always seemed to me, yet now I knew them for what they were—for, day by day, year by year, and all so subtly I would scarcely dream it, they would be stealing a woman's bloom away.

Often I took the needle from her very fingers, pressed their rough tips in mine with an old tenderness—

"Dear one, you've worked enough this day."

"I ought—"

"Yes, you ought to play awhile."

And it was wonderful how like a girl's her face grew rosy on our holidays—so like that other woman's face I saw in passing on golden mornings that I would cry,

"Kate, you are lovelier than the Princess!"

Then it would come to me how like a flower she would go on blooming—defying, even as the Princess, Time himself—if only I could keep her always in the sun.

XVIII

ND there was Jamie, that other star-eyed one of lovers three—hardy, red-cheeked, perennial, and coming up so fast, Kate said, she could almost see him growing. Soon he would need a self-made man for father, if half his dreams came true.

He was to go to college; but "first, father"— or so he told me, his face shining while I trimmed my cuffs, he was to have a pony: a spotted, circus one with long white mane and tail; and a saddle, and a little whip, and a yellow tie like Harry Pidgeon's, and a gun — oh yes, a gun! Then he would go a-hunting in the country where Aunt Phœbe lived. He would leave in the morning and get to Pine-

ville after dusk; and Aunt Phœbe would have a big, hot supper all waiting for him, and be surprised how he had grown. Then he would rise early, when the roosters crowed, and eat pancakes in the kitchen, and stuff sandwiches into the pockets of his coat, and be gone. And the first morning he would shoot, he said, "three rabbits and a squirrel, father," then eat his sandwiches on a log, and shoot a woodchuck that afternoon—and be home by six.

What human father could spoil a dream like that?

Already pony-time was drawing nigh. I thought surely to be ready for it, but it came so suddenly, or so it seemed to me. There had been no promise, it is true—only a sort of wistfulness on Jamie's part and hopefulness on mine. No word was broken, yet I could not help seeing the Other Lover's face as it might have been.

"Ponies," he said, as if by accident, "cost a good deal, father."

"Yes," I said.

"Especially to keep them," he continued.

"Funny," he said again, for I was silent. "Funny, isn't it, that such little horses should eat so much?"

"Oh, not so singular," I replied, "when you think how boys, sometimes, eat twice as much as men."

"I guess my legs are hollow," the Other Lover said.

"Father," he went on, after another silence, "do they ever have second-hand ones?"

"Ones?"

"Ponies."

"Yes."

"Well, they—they wouldn't cost so much now, would they?"

"Oh, sometimes more," I said.

"But a second-hand saddle, father, wouldn't cost so much?"

"No," I replied, and glanced up at him so curiously that his face flushed.

"I was just a-asking," he assured me, adding, "'Cause now, of course you—we couldn't—be any room for him here; but in the country, if we lived there, father, we might, mightn't we?"

"Ah, yes, in the country, son, I think we might," I said.

"If only I could see my way to do it," I told Kate afterward, but she shook her head.

"We might scrimp a little closer, I suppose," I said.

"There are so many things you need yourself, Jerry," she replied, and began to talk of a winter coat, though I had one then I had worn four years.

"And good for another two," I assured her. "The best investment I ever made."

"Jerry," she cried, "I shall never, never mend that worn-out thing again."

"It would be fine exercise," I continued.

"Mending!" she cried.

"Riding," I said. "It would develop him."

"I know, Jerry, but—"

"And teach him grace and courage," I went on, warming to my theme. "It would send the red blood tingling."

"It tingles now when he plays," she told me. "You should see his red cheeks."

"I do," I said.

I did. I saw them then behind a tossing mane.

"Besides," I heard, "it would cost so much to keep one."

Kate came and put her head against my cheek.

"We shall need so many little things," she said. "Really, you must put it out of your head, my dear."

I did. I put it there where so many things were going, where all those shining gowns of hers were hanging—those I had meant to buy for her long before pony-time. I put it there in a kind of stall, but without a halter — so that if better

days should chance to come to me it might more freely amble out again.

* * * * *

The wind had risen. A mist had floated across the moon. I had a mind to seek my chair again, but the lamps of a carriage shining a moment in the gateway opposite caught my eyes and drew them to that great house-shadow in the square.

Then as I gazed, with something of pony-time still lingering in my thoughts, it came to me how that self-same shadow had lain always across my pathway: first on my childhood, a faint reflection of a thing to wonder at as I stood peering through the fence; then on my youth, lying as lightly there as though of clouds to which my dreams went soaring; then on my manhood, phantom-like, reminding me of how those dreams had vanished with the years.

Yet now I smiled at it, a little sadly, thinking of how it lengthened to my very

threshold, darkening love itself awhile—days when I toiled, and unremittingly as the self-made men had said, yet was not one of them—hours when I gazed back wistfully to the lane to find it greener there than I had thought before.

Kate never spoke of those old lane promises—nor seemed ever to have even heard them. Every evening when I came from work her face shone for me as if I were the hero I had meant to be—and I was hero to little Jamie.

I leaned my head against the casement.

"To think," I said, gazing at that great, black symbol of the wealth I had not won, I ever let *you* hide the sun from me!"

Yet it was only for a little while.

One day that great house stood there, towering above my little one scarce higher than the lilacs; here in its shadow, lovers three—man, wife, and little playing boy—one day in pony-time; the very next . . .

I rose quickly from the window-seat. Pacing that room of books and memories,

it all came back to me—how, swiftly, from the very skies, that other darkness fell without a warning, blotting forever that puny shadow of a heap of stones.

Stones and mortar, oh, my Jamie! For as you lay there, white and still among the flowers, your father, staring through the windows in the vines, beheld that miracle: stones and mortar where had been a palace yesterday.

XIX

THE wind had fallen. I stood again, watching the stars in the pear-trees and thinking of the stillness. Strange! what a silence a little child leaves behind him, and all unbroken as long as he is gone.

Look in the garden: you will see no hyacinths—their scent stifles me; you will find red roses but no white ones there —and if there were Kate could not see them long, for memories.

That day we—we who had been so rich, yet did not know till we were poor—that day we were dumb who had always known so many words for love, who found grief lonely though our cheeks were wet with each other's tears—that day there came

from the big house opposite a wreath of lilies. We took them, wondering; but on the morrow, a mocking morning when all the world ran on without us, two little white hearses passed out of Chaffinch Street—one from a wooden, one from a great iron gate . . .

* * * * *

"Father!"

Was I dreaming?

"Father!"

I turned with out-stretched arms. Kate and my two boys, Bert and Leslie, were home again.

PART II

IN THE SUN

I

UNDAY: Kate left for Pineville yesterday.

"Go," I had said, twenty times if I said it once, "and stay a month, my dear. You are tired. It will do you good to be rid of us awhile."

"Yes, go, Aunt Kate," said Barbara, who is again a daughter to us. "I will be mother to the boys."

Yet it took us fourteen days to make up her mind for her, and she left at dusk, still doubtful, in a flurry of farewells. The telegram came this morning at breakfast-time.

"Arrived safely," it ran. "Send if you need me—Kate."

"Just like the girl," I said. "'If we

need her!' As if we couldn't run the house ourselves—eh, Barbara?"

My niece, who was pouring the coffee with a prim but unsteady hand, smiled reassuringly.

"We'll show her," said I, "that the authoress of *Lady Bombazine's Secret*—"

"Lady Bombazine!" cried my niece, indignantly. "Madelaine."

"Ah, yes—Madelaine, my dear. I forgot."

"Oh, dear," said Barbara, "and so did I."

"What?"

"You only take one sugar, Uncle Jerry."

"I'll drink it, Barbara," said Bert.

"Indeed," I interposed, "you'll do nothing of the sort, young man. Coffee at your age! Ridiculous! What would your mother say?"

"She lets me have it—doesn't she, Leslie?"

"Why, Bert!" said Barbara.

"She does, too! Mother often gives me coffee."

"O-oh!" drawled my niece.

"Often?" I asked. "How often?"

"Why, every once in a while, father."

"Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Barbara.

"And other days, too," cried my son, hotly. "I guess I know, Miss Barbara Burton. You needn't think you—"

"Boys!" I commanded.

"*I* didn't thay anything, father," protested my littler son.

"Bert"—I corrected myself. "Didn't mother tell you to mind Barbara?"

"Yes, but she didn't say that I couldn't have any—"

"Silence!" I commanded. "What's that you're mumbling, sir?"

"I was talking to Barbara."

"Then speak aloud. Barbara is right. Yet I do remember that you had coffee one Sunday not long ago. Still—this is

no way to ask for it. I've a good mind not to let you have it at all."

"Why, Uncle Jerry!" protested Barbara.

"Don't give him a full cup," I said, sternly. "He doesn't deserve it. Half will do."

"But, Uncle—"

"Put in three sugars, Barbara," said my son. He had cooled and was again most amiable, yet I could not dismiss the matter without some final stress on my reproof.

"The idea," I reminded him, "of a boy your age quarrelling at table!"

"*I* didn't quarrel, father, did I?" said my other, my righteous little son.

"No, Leslie," I replied, warmly, "you did not; and just to reward you, Barbara may put some coffee—just a taste now—just enough to color it—in your milk, my boy."

Breakfast went more smoothly after that. A little firmness in the nick of time,

as I tell Kate, is the secret of good discipline. Children are managed easily enough if one but knows—the way.

Barbara, somehow, while I was reading in the garden, got the two boys clean and starched for Sunday-school, and tied their ties for them. They went as usual by way of my right vest-pocket, from which I doled ten radiant pennies, hoarded—religiously is the very word—through the week. I watched them as they left the gate. Two finer lads—well, as I say, I saw them go, Bert head and shoulders above the little chap.

At noon they had not returned!

"Maybe they are at the Pidgeons'," said Barbara.

They were not next door.

"Perhaps they walked home with the minister, Uncle Jerry."

I thought backward till I had got as far as the time when an uncle-y goodman was, say, a cousinly bad boy.

"No," I said, firmly, "they would not have done that."

"They did once," my niece asserted.

"Are you sure, Barbara?"

"They said so."

"Hm," I replied. "Had they come home late that Sunday?"

"Mm—rather late."

"So I suspected. Still, we might try the minister."

Now the Pidgeons have a telephone—it is a neighborly way they have—but the Rev. Dr. Lemon had seen neither hide nor hair—or, to speak precisely, really had not "observed either of the dear children, but let us hope they are safe from harm."

Barbara, much agitated, put on her hat. She ran over to the church itself, a matter of ten short blocks or so—formerly but nine, before the Butterfields put up barbed wire. The edifice was empty.

"What shall we do, Uncle Jerry? It's —dinner-time."

She was out of breath.

"Do?" said I, gazing at her flushed cheeks. "Dine," said I.

"But, Uncle Jerry, suppose—"

"Barbara," I replied, calmly, as we went in together, "were you never a boy?"

"Uncle Jerry, I'm so anxious, and Aunt Kate away."

"That," I replied, "is probably the explanation."

"Oh, you think—"

"Um-hm," said I.

"Think what, Uncle Jerry?"

"Why," I said, "it's simple enough. These young rap—sons of mine have taken a long cut home."

"Oh, I hope so," she replied, fervently. "Why, Uncle Jerry, if anything should happen to them—"

"Never fear," I replied. "Something will happen to them, my dear."

"You won't hurt them, Uncle Jerry. Please don't hurt them."

I took up the carver with a firm grasp.

"Barbara," said I, "this is no time for weakness. They shall be treated as they deserve."

For a moment she was silent.

"Still, they may have an excuse, you know."

"Doubtless," I replied, "they will present one. We shall listen to it."

"I mean, it may be a good one, Uncle Jerry."

"Time," said I, "will tell."

We were silent again.

"They are usually such good boys, Uncle Jerry."

"Usually," I replied.

"And they do try to do what's right—and are so affectionate."

"True," said I.

"And are kind to animals."

"Oh, very."

We ate quietly.

"I—I shouldn't mind so much, Uncle Jerry, if it weren't for that dreadful creek."

"Creek!"

"Yes"—shuddering—"where they're always getting d-drowned."

"Good Lord!" said I, laying down my knife. "You don't for a minute suppose—"

"No," she replied. "They promised Aunt Kate never to go near it unless you were along. They would keep their word, Uncle Jerry."

"They are usually such good boys," I said.

"Oh yes," she assured me.

"And they do try to do what's right," I went on.

"Oh yes, Uncle Jerry."

"Yet, by George," said I, "I—"

"Oh, I'm sure they wouldn't go near it," said my niece.

"Still—" I said.

"That's just it," she replied, but added, hopefully, "Oh no, they wouldn't go near it. Don't worry, Uncle Jerry. It's a lovely place."

"But," said I, "it's a long way off."

"It is pretty far," she assented, "and oh, it's so grassy there where they swim—

grassy and sweet-smelling and butterflies all around, and the clear water and all—you're not eating, Uncle Jerry."

"Oh yes, I am," I replied, more heartily.

"It makes you want to swim just to look at it—even if you're a girl," my niece ran on. She was doing her cheerful best.

"But the boys can't swim a stroke!" I cried.

"No," she said. "That was the way with the Jeffrey boy."

"You mean the one that—"

"Yes; his foot caught in the weeds or something—but you're not half through, Uncle Jerry. There's going to be pie."

"No, thanks," I said, rolling my napkin. "I—I think I'll just—"

"There!" cried Barbara, so suddenly, so sharply I fairly leaped from my seat. "There they come, Uncle Jerry."

"W-where?" I gasped—but the next moment heaved a great sigh of thankfulness, for they were alone and came on their

own little, spindling legs, those boys of mine. Those two rapscallions came up the very steps I used to climb—came, hand-in-hand, with mud-sweet faces, and on their once-black Sunday shoes were the stains of just such boggy pools as frogs live in, and in their best black Sunday suits I saw the claw-prints of those barbs and brambles that lie in wait for you in country lanes.

"Well, well, young men," I said, hoarsely, clearing my throat. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, father, we know a bully place to get water-cress."

"Well," said I, still trembling with my —wrath. "Do you know what time it is?"

"It was longer than we thought, father," said my son, sweetly. "And, gee, father, I 'most fell in."

"Fell in!"

"Didn't I, Leslie?"

"Yeth, he motht fell in."

"The creek, do you mean?"

"Yes, we—"

"Didn't your mother tell you not to go near that—"

"We didn't, father. We just went in the meadows, and the first we knew the creek came right around to where we were picking water-cress. Didn't it, Leslie?"

"Yeth," said Leslie, still holding his brother's hand—and burst into tears. It is very hard to be tired and muddy.

"Well, I wouldn't cry about it," I said.

"And an awful big snake came, father—big as a boy-constrictor. Didn't he, Leslie?"

"Yeth—a—a awful—"

Now a harmless garter-snake will raise my hair, and the bare thought of those two defenceless boys of mine with a snake and a creek wriggling at their very heels while they bent innocently in the meadow grass for water-cress!

"Don't cry," I said. "You—you haven't had anything to eat, I suppose?"

"No, father."

They brightened visibly beneath their meadow-tan.

"Well, well," said I, sternly, "you don't expect—just look at yourselves!—you can't come to the table all mucky like that, you know."

"Come," said Barbara, pouncing upon them.

Then I remembered I was a father.

"Why, say," I cried, for she was spiriting them up the staircase. "I say, you two—look here! What the devil do you mean by—"

"O-oh, father!" gasped my son Leslie, levelling a bandit finger over the banister. "*You thaid devil!*"

Well—?

II

ONDAY: A letter came this morning. The folks are well, Kate says, and Helen has grown almost as tall as Barbara.

". . . write and tell me just how you are getting on without me, and if you need me do not hesitate to send. When I ran away I forgot to tell Barbara that the darned stockings are in the upper left-hand drawer of the walnut bureau—the boys' blue-and-white-striped waists are for Sunday, mind — don't let them wear them in the dirt—and, Jerry dear, do be careful that the boys don't tire the Pidgeons, and don't let them get the better of *you* (you know your weakness!). Let them have good times, certainly, and kiss them for their mother — bless their

little hearts, how I wish I could see them, and you, too, you—"

And so on. Kate writes the confoundedest filigree hand—no periods to speak of, either; capitals where she stops for breath. Still, it doesn't much matter; the oftener you read her letters the more you find there, overlooked — the sweetest grapes hang hidden in the vines.

"P. S.—I don't mean that I want you to be stern with them, but just keep them safely in bounds, you know. Tell them mother says they must be good boys and mind Barbara — (and not pull the wool over father's eyes!). Dearest, on second thought, you need not *tell* them that. You should hear brother George talk about *Pickwick!*"

"Boys," said I, as I started down-town this morning. "Remember now. Mother says you must mind Barbara."

"Yes, father."

"And don't be running over to the Pidgeons' all the time."

"No, father."

They are good boys, both of them. I left them playing Wild West—a breezy, virile sort of game, and looks more menacing than it is; for I noted carefully ere I left the street that in breaking broncos they fairly cleared Kate's flower-beds.

To-night, tired with being good, they went to bed, and Barbara, weary with much watchfulness, retired early to her room, leaving me to my small brown fate—curve stemmed, well bottomed, and cracked pleasantly with fire and time on the thumb side of the brier bowl.

"Now," said I, lighting and settling myself more deeply in my chair, "if Kate were here—"

For it is wonderful how attached to his wife a man becomes when she is eighty miles away. Or, rather, I mean, it is wonderful how a man attached to his wife becomes—now, I was not lonely. I do not mean that exactly, for I—rather, it was like this:

There opposite was the little low rocker she had always sat in to sew and listen to my reading after the children had gone to bed. Even if I read to myself, I knew she was there—and there is something in that.

No, I was not what you call lonely. She had only been gone two days. Let me see: just forty-nine hours and thirty-three minutes by my father's clock since we waved good-bye to her—thirty-*one* minutes, to be exact, for her train was two minutes late. Now forty-nine hours are a long space of time when you come to think of it—a married man lighting your pipe—and thirty-one minutes more do not help matters.

"Oh, well," I said, and reopened *Pickwick* for the hundredth hour of delight. After Jamie went away we fell, somehow, to looking at the books my father left me, old-fashioned things—Dickens, Scott, Shakespeare, and the like — which had stood there long neglected on our shelves.

We did not open them at once. We thrummed their backs awhile and tried more modern tales instead — splendid things and bound most sweetly, and some with heroes in them like Jack Chelsea champing their bits and neighing and rearing valorously, so that we cried aloud in our admiration—and straightway mixed and forgot them, almost every one. I cannot account for it, I am sure. I am not literary. They taught us one thing though—that there is no time like the past. What days those were! And how men loved and fought and died—and what lovely clothes they wore! Barbara, Barbara, but I knew myself for a poor, miserable, whipper-snapper of a fellow—I did not dream then of even being uncle-y—and I saw what humdrum lives we two were leading, Kate and I.

"Kate," I said, "I should have been my great - great - great - great - great - great - grandfather. Then, at least, I should have been a man."

Then we tried *Pickwick*. A-ah! Winkle, Tupman, Snodgrass, Weller, Jingle, Joe—why, bless you, we could remember *them!*

"Perhaps," said I, "it's because the book has such good eating, Katie. Don't you smell the chops, though, and taste the ale? You fairly feel it run down *their* throats because, I suppose, you have felt it sliding down your own; and, in a way, Kate—in a way, they were mostly ordinary men."

After a page of them our own little beefsteak tasted better; and when the fire in one of those little inns blazed up in Mr. Dickens's pages, by George, sir, our own little fire seemed cosey-like, with Kate sewing beside it, and laughing, and well-nigh swallowing the pins. We came to know each other better than before, so that we used to say sometimes, laughingly, that it was Mr. Pickwick who had introduced us all over again. Fancy the dear old gentleman, one hand beneath the tail of

his bottle-green coat and the other waving beneficently:

"Jerry Down, allow me to present you to your charming little wife, sir. Jerry — Kate. Kate — Jerry. God bless you both!"

"Kate," said I, "that man could have made a story out of you and me."

Now I am not sentimental—that is quite plain, I think—so I don't mind confessing here that there were moments—moments then when I even fancied that I, too, could have drawn up a ledger account of that girl Kate, beginning, say, with the pink wild roses in the lane. It is odd, but moments do come like that—when even an ordinary man *feels* literary.

We looked more sharply at my father's book-shelves after that. From *Pickwick* to the rest of Dickens was but pleasant stepping — say from an autumn to the buds of spring. We felt all the pride of increased acquaintanceship—mere characters, it is true, but some of them far

more real to us than flesh-and-blood ones of the world we knew. You cannot dismiss Mr. Samivel Weller with a word—and what of Joe?

Mornings in the car I often nodded to some kindly face.

"A fine day, sir."

"It is, indeed."

"Soon be leaving off overcoats."

"Yes, I saw a robin this morning."

Now from the redbreast to Mr. Pickwick may seem a day's journey, but I managed it pretty well, I fancy.

"A robin," I would observe, carelessly, keeping my goal, however, steadily in mind, "is a fine bird when you come to think of it."

"A very fine bird, indeed," doubtless would be the amiable reply; and if my comrade's breakfast had gone well with him, he might even add—"and it is a shame, sir, that they are ever shot."

In that event my eye would glitter.

"You take the words from my very

mouth. I wish, sir, from the bottom of my heart, that every robin hunter might be as poor a shot as our old friend Winkle —ha!—when he shot at the rooks. It makes me laugh every time I think of it. Winkle, you remember—but I beg your pardon. Of course, you've read *Pickwick?*"

And in some such—graceful way, as it were, we would fall to Dickensing delightfully. Now, if one talks but long enough on a congenial theme, one is apt, I note, to find fitting words for the pith of the matter—some epigram or little joke, favorite quotation from one's self, perhaps, to repeat if need be a hundred times. I remember well that I fell to saying with a little gesture that made it seem more by-the-bye:

"Mr. Pickwick is a—"

(For I never could say "was" in reference to that immortal gentleman.)

"Mr. Pickwick is a man, sir—a natural man, however extraordinary he may other-

wise appear. He eats, drinks, sleeps, laughs, gets mad, gets drunk, sir—like the rest of us."

That observation, harmless, silly little thing, never failed to win a smile or good-humored nod for me—never, I should say, save once when my strange companion shook a dubious head. He replied, flatly,

"I cannot agree with you."

I was chagrined, with my little climax ruined hopelessly.

"And why not?" I asked, flushing, for I hate argument; and, after all, what harm is there in letting a fellow have his way?

"Well," said he, "I am not prepared to admit that a man who gets drunk *is* a natural man, sir."

"But," said I, "you know how it is yourself. A man—"

"I beg your pardon, but I do *not* know how it is myself."

The fellow seemed irritated.

"Oh, well," said I, bridling in turn. "Of course, if you put it that way, the

whole matter resolves itself into a question—"

"Precisely," said my companion. "A question."

"A question," I repeated, firmly, "as to what *is* a natural man; and the fact that you don't appear to—er—know how it is yourself, sir, might cause grave doubt in some quarters as to your qualifications for being considered a—a natural man."

"Doubt in some quarters!" he snapped back at me. "What quarters?"

"Natural-man quarters."

"Haunts of vice," sniffed the enraged gentleman.

"Strong words," said I.

"Strong waters, sir."

A man in front of us turned around. Now I dislike notice in public places.

"We won't argue," said I.

"No," said my seat-mate—"no, we won't, my friend. This is my corner. I bid you good-day."

The man who had looked at us turned again. He grinned gleefully.

"Sort of ruffled the dominie, eh?"

"The devil!" said I.

"No, the dominie," said he. "Didn't you know? That was the Rev. Dr. Lemon of the Emmanuel—"

"Thunder!" said I. "He didn't look it."

"Or act it, either," said the man in front. "But you touched his soft spot. He's a prohib—"

"Well," said I, "I'm mightily sorry. I thought I was talking to a—"

"Natural man, eh?"

"At any rate," said I, "clergymen should be uniformed."

To-night as I mused of that little episode, thumbing *Pickwick* for some well-loved lines, it struck me as the oddest point of all that a man should be led astray by pride in his fatherhood of some such silly little jest as mine had been, to champion a thing he loathes. Why, I was never

drunk in my whole lifetime!—yet there, that day, was I, Jeremiah Down, as sober a family man as ever breathed, brandishing cudgels in defence of tippling!

I laughed softly at the memory, for in turning the pages I had come suddenly upon a favorite scene of mine. It was Mr. Pickwick sleeping off the fumes of hunt-punch in a wheelbarrow. Don't you remember?

III

TUESDAY: We are growing used to it, this being alone, we four; and while, to be sure, there is still that sense of an absence, a vacancy in the little low rocker —at the coffee-pot—in the garden—up-stairs—everywhere—we are quite cheerful. The boys are good, Barbara is wonderful, and I—I am too old now not to do very well. What we lose in years, I find, we gain in philosophy. Even those dear to us, I was going to say, are not so necessary. Mind, I do not say so; I was only about to say so—a different matter. Days I am busy down-town; evenings I have my young folks and my pipe and books. I am—I was about to say—content.

To-night, for instance, I had flown so

far on the wings of an old, old tale, Pineville was as near as Chaffinch Street for aught I knew or cared.

"By George!" said I, softly, to myself, "there was a man who could write."

"Who's that, Uncle Jerry?"

I had forgotten Barbara.

"Shakespeare," said I.

"Oh," she replied, "of course."

Now Kate once made that same reply to me. Everybody says "of course" about Shakespeare, yet for years that man just squatted on my shelves, or stood on one leg, then on t'other, elbowed this way and jostled that on dusting days, and I never so much as offered him my hand. Yet there are some mighty pretty things in Shakespeare—if you leave out the notes. No water, please, in mine; I like the honest liquor better, and care not if it burns my tongue. You hear so much of him as a school-boy (*we* met, I remember, over Cæsar's bier in the Fourth Reader), and you grow to manhood with such a quak-

ing class-room memory of a yard of notes for every foot of verse, that I, for one, was a little prejudiced against the fellow. But when I stumbled on him one winter's night and led him to the lamp and held him off and had a look at him—

"By George!" said I to Kate, I remember, "there was a man who could write. Jessica—pretty name; nice name for a little girl, eh, Kate? Shylock didn't get his pound of flesh, the beggar. Portia—listen, Kate!—the whole class used to say:

"'The quality of mercy—'"

Kate took the pins out of her mouth.

"'—is not strain'd.
It droppeth—'"

and I'm blest if the dear girl did not say the whole speech through without a falter.

"Good," said I; "when did you learn that, Kate?"

"In school," she told me. "Our class

gave the play once, and I was Portia. They all said—well—"

"They all said what?" I asked, for Kate sometimes needs urging.

"Said I was—awfully good as Portia."

Her eyes had brightened at the recollection. There was a rosy flush in her pale cheeks. I smoked silently. I was wondering how she had looked as Portia, and I remember it seemed a little odd to me that there had ever been a time when she was not mine, when her eyes had sparkled and her lips had moved with pretty words and I not near to hear them.

"So you were Portia?" I said.

"Yes."

"Who was—let me see—who was this chap Ba-Bassanio, in the play?"

"Tommy Rogers. I haven't seen Tommy in years. He runs a dry-goods store out West. He did very well as Bassanio."

I did not at once say anything. I wanted to be sure. So I smoked quietly and

looked up certain little passages that I seemed to remember, vaguely, in the play. There was one in particular, and when I found it I read aloud to Kate:

"'A gentle scroll — Fair lady, by your leave;
(Kissing her).'"

"Kate," said I, "did — did Tommy Rogers—kiss you—there in the play?"

"Mm—not exactly," my wife replied, threading her needle.

"Not exactly!" I repeated. "Just what do you mean by 'not exactly,' Katie?"

"Well, he—"

"Out with it," said I.

"He made believe, or something."

"Or something, Kate!"

"Do you think I let boys kiss me when I was in school?" she asked, sharply.

"Well, then," I replied, "all I have to add, Katie, is this: that if it is true, as you seem to indicate, that Tommy Rogers did not kiss you—"

"Don't you believe me?" she inquired, pertly.

"If," I repeated, "Tommy Rogers did not kiss you then and there as the play warrants, Tommy Rogers was a little fool."

"Tommy Rogers *wasn't* a little fool!" said my wife, warmly. "He was a nice—"

"Oh," I cried, "he *wasn't* a little fool, then!"

"Don't be silly, Jerry," my wife replied, and in a manner which seemed to indicate that affairs had gone quite far enough. I did not press her. Sometimes I think he didn't. Sometimes — well, I'm glad I don't know Tommy.

"There's this to be said for Shakespeare," I said to Barbara to-night. "He wrote as nicely about spring and crocuses and little young brooks and things as he did about lords and battles, and even his kings get gloomy, Barbara, like you and me. Doesn't it strike you as a little strange," I asked, "that we should feel sorry for a king?"

She actually blinked, that romantic maid.

"I had never thought of it that way, Uncle Jerry," she confessed.

"So I supposed," I responded, airily. "There was nothing uppish about Shakespeare. Why, I suppose if he lived next door, Barbara, and just dropped in of a morning for a dozen buckwheats, he'd like as not fill up his pipe from my tobacco-jar and go home and write as pretty a quotation about those cakes as you'd ever see."

"Uncle Jerry!"

"He certainly could write quotations, my dear. I suppose he wrote more of them than any man who ever lived. You may find more in the Bible—but several fellows had a hand in that."

"Uncle Jerry!" cried my niece, now horrified.

I strolled, smoking, to the shelves and laid my fingers fondly against those faded backs.

"Blest if I don't try Milton next," I said.

(In a corner of the highest shelf, far too high for prying youth, I spied a book —a tiny, green-bound innocent, it seemed—and smiled gently to myself. Of all the bold-faced—why, if a fellow wrote like that to-day, by George, sir, they would tar and feather him. It isn't what he says so much as what he al-*most* says. Wonderful, though, how he could make the least thing interesting. There is a place where he meets an ass—jackass—in a narrow way. He can't get by, nor can the ass, and he tells what he thinks, and what the ass thinks—it's as good as a play. But the best of all is dear old Uncle Toby!)

"Barbara," said I, lowering my eyes, "have you ever read—how do you say it? —Vicker or Vyker? I always said Vyker before I knew, and it's hard to change. *The Vicar of Wakefield*—ever read that?"

My niece declared it a silly old thing.

"A-ah, Burns!" said I, touching him

lovingly. "There's the poet of them all, my Barbara! If you ever get low in the spirits and think yourself mighty poor, common mud of a man, take my advice —read Burns. He'll send you whistling to the office, darlin'."

"Uncle Jerry, what *are* you saying?" my niece interposed.

"I forgot you were reading," I replied, "but all these books, my dear, your aunt and I have read together, and if anything ever happens to her or me, the one who is left has only to read them again to bring back happy times here in this little room. After Jamie went away I was down in the mouth, and I didn't think much of myself, but when I found some of these fine old fellows here saying the very things I'd been preaching—yes, all my life—the things I had said at the office, the things I had said to Kate, and to neighbor Pidgeon over the fence—only, of course, they said them much better than I ever could—why, just to learn that

so many great men, you see—er—as it were, agreed with me—Barbara, it perked me up a bit. 'Jerry,' said I, 'you're not such a fool as some might think. Without ever reading those chaps at all, you fell to thinking things out for yourself, and the only difference, on the whole, between you and—Shakespeare, say—was—'"

"Uncle Jerry!" my niece protested. "There you go again. You start out serious, but I never know when you leave off."

"Girlie," said I, "did I ever tell you about the poem I wrote in school?—or, rather, I began it. It was never completed."

"Can you say it, Uncle Jerry?"

"I remember the first words:

"'O Greece, thy—'

That is as far as I ever got. I don't recall now whether the trouble was with Greece or me, but, somehow or other, I

never finished it. Still, when you come to think of it, it had about as pretty a beginning as any of Tennyson's. I tell you, Barbara, I've got some splendid ideas if I could only get them down."

"That's just the trouble with me," my niece replied. "I've thought out lovely things for *Lady Madelaine*, but somehow I can't write them. Professor Jenkins says in class that it isn't what you say that counts so much in writing, it's how you say it."

"Exactly," I replied. "That's the great difference between Shakespeare and me."

"Oh, Uncle Jerry!"

"At least," I added, "it's one of the differences. You see, while an ordinary chap like me may know a thing, it takes a Shakespeare kind of fellow to—"

"To say it beautifully," my niece put in.

"True," said I. "And another thing, Barbara—a-n-n-nother thing," I stammered, for I was afraid the matter would give me the slip before I could out with

it, "is this, my dear: you n-never know what you do know till you see it all written down for you by somebody else."

"I see," she assented.

"And so," I cried, rushing on pell-mell —for it's wonderful how the ideas come to you, one on the other's heels, while you're talking—"so," said I, "we should read the great authors to get acquainted with ourselves."

"You talk like Professor Jenkins," said my niece, thoughtfully.

"Professor Jenkins," I replied, heartily, eying her over my glasses—dear, serious little thing!—"Professor Jenkins is a very sensible man, my dear."

She shook her head at me.

"Uncle Jerry, I don't know what's to become of you. You've been full of the Old Nick ever since morning."

She may have been right about it. It is called the Old Nick, I know, in a man of my age; but years ago when I cut such

capers they called them by a sweeter name.

Have you never set out on a fresh, sweet morning, with the air cool and the sun warm and your soul swelling like an apple bud, and then as your steps quickened hummed to yourself snatches of nothing you ever heard—tunes made up of the moment's melody—and have you never then chanted to them foolish words?

To-day we had such a morning, a spring pattern—birds and leaves on a background of blue and gold—and as I walked to the office I own I sang a hodge-podge to the May.

"Love, thou art—thou art—my soul is bending unto thee-e-e-e—oh, gentle one, the wind is blowing—come to my heart, my heart, my ha-ha-heart, my Rosaline . . ."

Now who was Rosaline? I never knew girl named Rosaline. She was the morning—the white clouds scudding overhead —the sparrows twittering — the yellow

dandelions in the grass-plots—the breeze —the sun! And so I carolled to her under the wind, till suddenly it paused — the note was high—my voice cracked painfully—two passing play-boys grinned at me. My song was over.

That something then, that thing which opened my eyes and urged me townward at a faster pace, which swelled in my bosom and burst into silly ditties to the spring-time, came oftener when I was a lad. It made me run then, shout, leap, fight with shadows till my face reddened like the rose. Now?—it makes a fool of me. Rosaline!

It is a morning madness that comes and vanishes like the dew. Sometimes for days, for weeks, it does not come at all. Then my brow is furrowed, my eyes a-squint with petty cares. But it returns some morning when I least expect it. Waiting for muffins, I laugh with Kate. I challenge Bert. I toss little, gurgling Leslie above my head. Youth—no, it is the Old

Nick now, they call it; once they called it by the sweeter name.

It came, as I say, this very morning, with a foolish song.

"Jerry," said I, "you grow poetical. You are a little lame, no doubt, but, man, you have the spirit of the thing. You have the frenzy. If only you could keep it glowing all day long—all through the weeks, the years—you, too, might be a Tennyson!"

I was proud of that little thought, proud of what I might have been—*if!* I mused more kindly of my Rosaline, who might—who knows?—have been immortal in a lyric—*if!*

The nonsense pleased me, and, though I laughed at it, straightway began to look with a new reverence upon the men who preserved their youth for us—poets—a lot of boys, they are, grown tall and musical, playing and piping along the road-side in the sun, dreaming in attics on rainy days.

And so to-night, as I sat with Barbara reading, I found new beauty in familiar lines. I said to myself:

"On a beautiful morning he thought of that. I wonder was he sitting somewhere on a stile."

And then again:

"This one smacks of a garden walk under stars and pear-trees. That one came to him looking down into a child's bright eyes."

Reading and musing thus, I, Jerry Down, little one-horse, incoherent poet of a morning hour, author of *Rosaline*—reading, I say, and musing of a mighty poet of a lifetime, singer of a hundred lovely songs, I felt the breath of some half-forgotten spring-time blowing upon me.

"And so," I vowed, "I'll go on reading to the end—not to be wise—not, God knows, to be literary—but to be young again."

IV

EDNESDAY: "Is it good?" I asked them, for my mouth watered.

"Um," was all I could make them say. They were licking the frosting-pan. Barbara, it seems, had baked a cake, cocoa-nut, an old favorite of mine, and while she was forever stealing to the pantry door to have another look—to be quite sure, I suppose, that it still cooled upon the sill, or that its white layers would bear up patiently till time for tea—Bert and Leslie scraped manfully, with two mighty spoons, on the kitchen steps.

"Oh, Uncle Jerry, I *hope* it's good."

"Never fear," said I, "you'll see; there won't be a smidgen of it left."

"But it's only the third that I ever made," she said, so tremulously that I patted her cheek and repressed a smile. Mark—I repressed it! Cakes, baking or eating, are no laughing matter, take an old hand's word for it. He is a wise man who knows when to smile at one.

I learned my lesson long ago when Kate first came to Chaffinch Street. She was always such a girl then, blithe and eager and fond of little things. It was half the cake to see her pride in it—but when it fell!—when things went wrong somehow with its soft little middle, for which, it seems, no remedy is known—it was well then to be soft with its softness, and with Kate. I was long discovering (for I am a man) that in the matter of home-made cakes their worth lies less in their sweet-and-lightness than in the hands that baked them.

"I did it myself, Jerry!"

Dear child! Many's the time I quenched that shining in her eyes. It seemed

more needful to be honest, to be witty, than to be kind. Heavens! Suppose I had been too tender! No, I must play the man and hide myself behind a jest. So was I long discovering that to a woman belated praise is as none at all.

Yet even man, when you come to think of it, is a bit touchy when his dish fails. In our town once there was a man I knew who ran for city clerk—a cake political which promised well outside. But when they cut it on election night, lo! it was all doughy within. We did not smile at him. We said but little, and said it kindly, without a touch of wit. He had sowed cigars and reaped a smoke which dulled his eyes for a twelvemonth. He had followed the recipe—but the fire, I believe 'twas said, had not burned well.

It is wise, then, to like fallen cakes, and I always do, literally, for they sometimes candify. To love things not for themselves, but for those who make them and give them lovingly—to love each other in

spite of frailties—is, some men think, quite happiness enough.

"Is it good?" I asked—"the pan, I mean," for the frosting seemed quite gone, yet they still scraped hopefully.

"Um," they said.

"It will spoil your appetites," I suggested. They only grinned at me.

"Better try a little water now," I said. They smacked their lips.

"It would spoil the taste," they averred.

"It's so sweet," I objected.

"That's why we like it," they replied.

"Can you taste it *yet?*" I asked.

"Um—fine!"

They reviewed the pan.

"There's a piece you didn't get," said I. It was scarcely to be measured, but they divided it. I gazed silently. Then the thought of all that whiteness gone, of all that sweetness never to be licked again in pans now rusting Heaven knows where — it was too much for me; and when they licked their spoons, critical-

ly, this side and that and down the handle!—

"That's nothing," I cried. "You ought to have seen the pans I used to lick! Um —chocolate!"

They went on licking their spoons.

"Cocoa-nut's better," they declared.

"Better than chocolate!" I retorted.

"Um. It's sweeter," they replied. They were so calm about it, so devilishly contented that I—

"What's the use arguing?" I told myself. Turning my back upon them, I sought my pipe. "Come, come," said I, "be a man, Jerry Down. Be a man."

Now the cake proved good. Barbara beamed upon the whole tea-table. I thanked her publicly in a set speech, in behalf of myself and boys, and to-night I wrote it all down to Kate—pan, spoons, and all.

"Six pages of cocoa-nut," I told myself, as I numbered the seventh and still wrote on.

"You ask," I wrote, "what your birds and flowers are doing. Bert saw an oriole this morning. Leslie has hunted for it all day long. 'I never thee anything but old robinth an' thparrows,' he complained to me.

"The birds had an orchard brawl to-night in the pear-trees—such bickering, bullying, billingsgate you never heard—flights and counter-flights, highway-birds skulking in leafy lanes, swift sorties from scented thickets, pecks, cries, sounds as of feathery cudgellings! It was a quarter to eight and a cold, damp spring twilight before they stopped.

"Chirp! chirp! chirp! . . . Chirp! . . . Chirp! chirp!

"Silence.

"Chirp!

"'The last word,' said I, 'like an old woman.'

"Chirp!

"Silence again, save for a church-bell.

"Chirp!

"Silence—silence. The last rioter was in bed.

"As to the flowers, Barbara shall tell you of the wistaria blooms, pale blue and pendulous on the porch corner. The red blossoms of the Japanese quince and the yellow ones of the flowering currant shrubs are dropping, but the lilacs are white and lilac and fragrant in full flower. There's bridal wreath and almond flowers and bleeding hearts (including mine), but the lilacs—um! you can smell them from the street. All the Pidgeon boys except Margaret, who has the toothache from eating so many caramels, were here tonight, finding out who loves butter with our last dandelions.

"I said I would leave all this for Barbara to write, but it is the only news I can think of, for I have been pottering around in the brown garden ever since I came home, and nothing has happened but birds singing and children playing and flowers smelling sweet. We are getting

on—don't worry. The boys are as good as gold—"

I had written those very words when the door-bell rang. It was only Mrs. Pidgeon, but as I ushered her in I thought there was a certain little air of stiffness I had never observed before. I offered her my pomegranate chair.

"Thank you," she said.

"What ails the woman?" I asked myself. She had an unwonted color, and the chair arms—at least the lame one, trembled, I thought, in her nervous grasp.

"I called," she began, but paused a little, breathlessly, so that I lost my head and blurted out,

"Oh, I heard from Kate to-day."

"Indeed! I hope she is well."

"Very. She is going to stay a month."

"I—I cannot say I am glad," my neighbor replied, frankly.

"Nor I," I as heartily rejoined, laughing. We were on better ground. "It is

very good of you," said I, politely, "to miss her too."

"I *do* miss her," she replied, with even more emphasis, I thought, than the matter warranted.

"The house," said I, "does seem—"

"In fact," said my visitor, who did not appear to hear my voice, "your *boys*—"

She paused dramatically, and went on: "Your boys miss her, Mr. Down."

"Ah, yes," said I, "the dear little fellows—"

"There is every evidence, Mr. Down, that they are—without a mother."

"Oh yes," I assented. "True—they are without a mother." There was an awkward silence then, sufficient time to reach for my pipe and lay it down again and cross my legs.

"Still," I said, "Barbara does very well for one so young."

There was no assent. Now I have never known Mrs. Pidgeon very well. In fact, I have always been something of a coward

before that famous tongue, but I like her boys—Margaret especially. Pidgeon, too, is a pleasant, quiet little man.

"Mr. Down," said my caller, trying apparently to say it calmly, "you may wonder—you may think it strange that I should call in this way."

"Why should I?" I interposed.

"I do not wish to interfere," she continued.

"I'm sure you would not," I replied, smiling, but scenting evil in the air.

"And I would not come to you," she went on, candidly, "were your wife at home. It is my duty, I think, however, in her absence, to inform you—painful though that duty may be, and *is*, Mr. Down—that your two boys—"

"Why," I exclaimed, "what—"

"Mr. Down, they have been teaching my boys to swear!"

"Impossible, Mrs. Pidgeon!"

"*Quite* possible, Mr. Down. I heard them myself. Yes, by the back fence.

Your little Leslie said—to be quite frank with you, for we are both parents—said, '*The devil!*'"

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes. And then your Bert said—what we've said was said—I need not repeat it."

"No," said I. "Proceed, Mrs. Pidgeon."

"And then my John said it, and then my Thomas said it, and my little Philip said it!"

"Well, well," I murmured, taking a turn into the bay to get my wits about me.

"And that is not all, Mr. Down."

"What then?" I gasped.

"When I went out to them, when I had told them what naughty, vulgar, low-down language I had overheard—words, I said, that no gentleman would dream of using—your little Leslie spoke right up and said—"

"Oh," I protested, "are you positive, Mrs. Pidgeon, that you—"

"Positive? Did I not tell you that I heard them myself?"

"Yes," said I, "but—"

"I feared you would doubt me," she replied, in a tone of cutting sweetness. "You are always taking the children's part."

"Oh," said I—

"I am sorry," she went on, "that you should think for a moment that I could—"

"You quite misunderstand me," I protested.

"You have known me for a good many years, Mr. Down. We have been neighbors, and I do not think you can say, truthfully, that in any previous instance I have ever—"

"Oh no, no, no!" I exclaimed. "Why, Mrs. Pidgeon, I trust you implicitly—implicitly!"

"Then why do you—"

"Oh, I don't. I don't, Mrs. Pidgeon. It merely struck me—in fact, don't you see, I was so surprised, so astounded to

think that *your* children—who as I have said, not once, but many times to Kate, are always such little gentlemen—to think that your children should have permitted my children to use such—as you say—vulgar language."

"I am glad, Mr. Down, to hear you say that. Glad, I mean, to hear you call such language vulgar, because when I spoke to the boys, using that very adjective, your little Leslie—"

"They were by the fence, I think you said, Mrs. Pidgeon?"

"Right by the back fence."

"By the currant bushes?"

"Yes. Well, no—hardly—just by the —just about where you have your hollyhocks."

"I see," I mused—"by the hollyhocks."

"Yes. And as I started to tell you, Mr. Down, your little—"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Pidgeon," I broke in, "but before I forget it—and I shall forget it if I do not speak at once—let me say to

you that I do not want you to misunderstand me. I am not attempting to defend my boys in using such—in this or in any other misdemeanor. They are usually good boys, I think—I have never, for example, known either of them to tell a lie."

"A-ah!" said my neighbor, "that's just the point I was getting at, though I should be sorry, indeed, to disappoint you in your little Leslie. I have known and respected you for a long time, Mr. Down, and somehow I couldn't believe he was speaking truthfully when he said—"

"Mrs. Pidgeon," I said, gravely, and with some vehemence for one of my easy temperament, though as courteously as I could, "spare me these tales, I pray. It is a peculiarity of mine that I never could bear to have any one, even Kate, come to me telling stories about my children unless I was needed to assist in preserving discipline. I take it that I am needed now. Let us come to the point then. What would you have me do?"

"Merely this: while there is nothing so very terrible, Mr. Down, in what they said—"

"No, nothing criminal," I assented, heartily.

"Still," she continued, "it is important that any such tendency should be nipped in the bud."

"Right," said I.

"And surely," she said, "you cannot expect me to punish *my* boys for what your boys—"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Pidgeon."

"Yet some one," she added, "should be held responsible."

"True," I agreed. "Mrs. Pidgeon, if you will leave this matter entirely in my hands, I think I can promise you that the guilty party shall not escape. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Y-yes," she replied, rising. "I think so, though there was one point—something, I've forgotten what—I had particularly intended to—"

"Be assured, Mrs. Pidgeon," I said, heartily, as we moved doorwards, "I know just how you feel. I know your pride in your children, of whom any parent might well be proud."

"Really, Mr. Down, you are good to say so."

"And how is Margaret?" I asked.

"Much better."

"I'm glad of that. What a glorious night. By-the-way, let me get you some pansies."

Inside alone again I took up my pen.

"The boys are as good as gold," I read, and added, firmly:

"All is peaceful here. With love, Jerry."

V

THURSDAY: "I thought Mrs. Pidgeon's glance suspicious as I nodded good-morrow to her on my way down-town—because, I suppose, she has not yet heard any sound of crying. Nor will she, though she listen till her ears are dumb. That devil matter has been settled painlessly.

The court assembled in the library. There were Barbara, the two boys, and the guilty man, who was observed to shuffle in his seat uneasily and shift his eyes from the murky world within to that shining one without the — er — grated windows. What his thoughts were as he saw the bright sun gleaming in the soft spring foliage, what memories may then have

come to him of those innocent young childish days now gone forever, when he played as a bright-eyed child by his mother's side, what blasted hopes may have torn that bosom heaving now under a weight of sin—alas! who can tell? Ah, well!!!

"Bert," said the guilty man—"Leslie."

"Yes, sir."

"Mrs. Pidgeon was here last night. She says that you boys have been teaching her boys to say 'the devil.' Is that—er—true?"

They hung their heads.

"Yes, sir." "Yeth, thir."

They brightened again.

"But, father, you—"

"Exactly, my sons. You heard me say it. I said it in a thoughtless moment, and I regret it very much. Oh, it isn't a crime to say it, and some folks think it smart—but I don't. It isn't a good word; it's vulgar; and though a man—even a gentleman—may say it sometimes, foolishly, when he forgets himself, why, when

he hears his boys say it—his little, young, manly sons, growing up—hang it all, it makes him ashamed of himself. You know how it is yourselves: a fellow's likely to say things, now and then, that he's deuced sorry for afterwards, but, I tell you, it cuts him all up when he thinks he's gone and tempted—er—other nice young fellows, you know, to say the same silly thing. Now, just between us three and Barbara, who—er—represents your mother in this matter—as man to man, I thought I'd speak right out about it and—er—ask you not to use that expression—if you don't mind. I don't blame you at all, you understand. I blame myself. But I—er—wanted you to know how I feel about it, and—er—what do you say to ten cents worth of gum-drops? Do you feel equal to it?"

They did. Yes, sir, they did. And there were no tears, no whackings, and at the same time the devil, I have every reason to believe, was checked in his nefari-

ous mission-work in Chaffinch Street. And the Pidgeon boys *will* be surprised if they try that swearing game on my two primed and ready little sons. Oh, I know them! I can hear Bert now—for in the rôle of Jerry Down my son is a chip of the old back-log. I may not be a hero to the world, but to my boys—ah! without egotism, I may say it frankly: I am a hero of the deepest dye.

I was a boy once myself. I know the feeling. Sometimes I can stand away and see myself as if I were my own father, and then I find I am apt to choose the softer word. I have said I am a hero to my sons—yes, but a hero who is not a hero, or only a friendly sort of hero, after all.

Now and then I take them into my confidence, give them—Bert particularly, for he is nearer to my age—give him some bit of counsel, pearl of great price for which I paid dearly enough, Heaven knows, in my time. What does he say? To me:

"Yes, father."

To himself:

"That's all well enough for father, but he doesn't understand *me*. I'm different, I am."

For Bert, remember, is a sunburned school-boy whose heart beats faster than his head. *He* will not settle down into this humdrum life of father—bless you, what addle-patedness! He'll never just live on from day to day supporting his family—what a narrow, hand-to-mouth, slave-till-night, sleep-till-morning sort of business, to be sure! No, Bert is to be a senator or a general or something. How, then, can my advice be of value to such a man?

My father was just such an ordinary fellow—till I grew up myself and became a father and an ordinary man. Now it comes to me sometimes that he was quite a good deal of a kind of hero, father was, in his time.

"Jerry," said he, one day when I was

a school-boy, "you'll get some of this nonsense knocked out of your head one of these days."

"Father," said I, "I'll not do anything of the kind. You don't understand me; you never have; you never will."

"Humpf!" said father.

"Bert," said I to my son only the other day, "when you're as old as I am you'll learn a thing or two. You'll learn to—"

"Father," said he, his eyes blazing like coals—"father, I'll never be an old duffer."

"Tut!" said I, "am I—"

"And, father," said he, "I'm not a child any more like Leslie," and burst into tears.

Then I remembered that I had forgotten myself—even most boyish of fathers will. I had been trying to make him see things my way—it was all so plain to me; he had been trying to make me see things his way—it was all so plain to him; and he won't see my way for years, and I—I'll

never quite see things his way any more—and there you are, and a nice sort of pickle we do get into now and then.

Am I an old duffer, I wonder? I am not a boy any longer, it is true; and if I am not a boy—or a general or something—I suppose Bert's right, after all. The little bird bears him out. Something warm and glowing—and impudent—has departed. I just live on from day to day, working for the boys and Kate. Kate! Bert loves his mother; yes, but wait a while till he gets to the wife-age. *His* wife never will breathe hard on the stairs. She will be a fairy always and read poems in a rose garden. . . . Now, how in Jericho did I guess that? Did I — nonsense! And suppose I did? I was only a young fool then. Now—old duffer—old duffer, hey? He ought to be ashamed of himself, the rapscallion, calling names.

Dear Kate! who writes that she never was half so lazy and free from the little things that look so tall—but adds, I note,

that a month is a long, long while to stay away. There she is eighty miles and almost five days yonder, on the other side of Care, yet sighs to be back again.

"... I am having a lovely, lovely time," she writes to me. "It is so restful here. It is doing me a world of—"

See how she tries her best to be blithe about it!

"... Still I should love to see you, d—Jerry" (she makes her J's like D's), "and the boys and Barbara—"

Wives, after all, are such dependent souls! And then again, over the page—here:

"There is no hurry in this charming—"

Not that.

"I can sleep so late in the—"

Nor that.

"I had the best—"

Hm—that's about the picnic. Oh, here it is:

"Do you realize that four whole days have gone already?"

I was afraid a month would be too much for her.

"And do you realize that there are more than three whole weeks yet left to play"—"stay," she means, though it looks like "play"—"yes, three whole weeks, Jerry" (listen to this!), "and never a peep at my three dear boys and that one little almost-girl-of-ours!"

Now if that is not lonesomeness—but! see how she ends:

"A month is a long, long while to stay away."

You can hear her sighing between the lines, yet she thinks she is fooling me! Three merry pages that would not cheat a ninny, let alone a husband—then at the very end, when she thinks herself safe, bubbles over and gives the whole thing away.

"A month is a long"—dear girl, she never could quite conceal herself—"long while." And it is, when you come to think of it—one-twelfth of a year! Think of a

woman away from her home and children and flowers and buttons to sew on—one-twelfth of a twelvemonth! No wonder her heart fails her, and only five days gone. I should be lonesome myself.

You cannot work for the ones you love, year in, year out, and find much joy away from them. I know myself, for the very winds now sing to me of home, because of home I have been always thinking as they've murmured by me, mornings, evenings, all these years. Sunbeams and shadows playing in my way remind me of children romping; evening skies tell me of Kate, always of Kate — because in a path under stars and pear-trees we have walked together when the day's work was done, arm in arm, brushing the currant bushes as we passed, bending our heads under a bough just low enough for a leaping boy.

I was thinking this evening in the garden, in that very path—it was a wonderful mild May twilight, too fragrant far to

remain in-doors, and somehow I had no heart for books, though I tried them, one by one—I was thinking of this and that, and Kate. Life, it is true, is a little quieter than we had planned—but so the brook comes down the hill-side, singing bravely of how its waters will stir the valley—yet they flow below there sweetly, calmly, without a murmur, and far more deeply than before. And there, also, they feed the meadows; before they had only wetted a few bright pebbles and moss-grown stones.

So did the brook love of Beecher's Lane come plashing into Chaffinch Street—and where before in its hill-side pools among the rocks it paused but long enough to reflect a leaf or two of the world above it, here in the open it has lingered tranquilly to give back cloud for cloud and star for star.

But who shall make words run as the days run—not too blithely nor yet too grimly—sadly here and sweetly there,

smoothly, silently, where the depths are, babbling gayly over shallows. How shall a man find words for his own love-story—morning words with the dawn just shining through them, noontide words with the sun hot in their skies, words of evening with twilit shadows, night words still and wonderful as with the moonbeam's witchery?

I tried the house again—the garden was so still. I tried my pipe, my books, but rose and tramped again in the little pathway. The place seemed quiet as the tomb. The boys had gone up-stairs early. Barbara was away. It was a silent, moody kind of night.

Now I love flowers—less to pluck them than to watch them, happy in the places where they once were little, and to snuff them in with the airs they scent. To-night that fragrance of Kate's dear garden—I was thinking of her, and it seemed to me as I looked backward that I might have been kinder sometimes. I was

thinking of her and her — boys, she calls us, all three of us—nay, four there are to this very day, for even as I walked to-night with the sound of leaves above me, I heard a wind blowing in some other, some half-remembered May—and Jamie's voice.

Then selfishly I fell to thinking of that one of four who first grew up, and then grew down again to be, Kate says sometimes, the youngest of them all.

"Where," I asked, "are the sabre scars on those apple-cheeks, round and ruddy? Ay, there are seams there—and about the corners of that old mouth! What of the blood and the smoke and the bugles blowing?"

I asked it of that little boy grown grizzled in a nameless war, and now never to be a hero.

"Tell me," I asked, "how was it that 'a youth and ruddy and of a fair countenance' went out to conquer a Philistine world with 'five smooth stones out of the

brook, in a shepherd's bag'—and came back but an uncle-y goodman, and without a tale for his children climbing upon his knee? Where did you get those scars then, Jerry Down?"

The world was silent. I lingered long after all in the street seemed sleeping—yet was not alone. I had gone inside. The clock struck twelve as I turned to the windows to shut them for the night. I heard a noise without. I peered out cautiously. All seemed quiet, but still I listened. Suddenly I heard again a kind of grating sound, which came, I thought, from the old pear-tree.

"Odd," said I, with a queer kind of prickling in my hair. "Some one is breaking in!"

Then a shadow dropped from those dark boughs—and, mark you, with a thud!

"Early for pears," said I. "Some one is breaking *out*."

But all was silent. I drew back care-

fully and put out the light. There was a whisper then:

"All right. Come on."

Another—from above somewhere:

"I'm afraid."

"Sh! not so loud."

"But I can't reach it."

"I think," said I, "I will pick that fruit," and I stole noiselessly from the window. To the garden is but a step from the kitchen doorway, and as I walked there, full in the moonlight, smoking and musing of that fairy world of nocturnal May, I thought to myself: How beautiful is an aging pear-tree, though it leans decrepitly upon a sill!

"And what an odd, gnarled trunk!" I said, aloud. "I never noticed that bump before."

A strange bump, too, it was; no matter from where you viewed it, it seemed to be always on the farther side.

I seated myself where the moon was brightest—sat there a full half-hour if I sat a minute. Then I heard a sigh.

"Dear little boys," I murmured, "asleep up-stairs."

The bump was motionless.

"Never," I mused, but so that the world might hear if so it chose — "never were two such good little sons as mine."

I was not sure, but the bump seemed lower.

"Always obedient," I went on. "Always frank and manly—oh, never sneaking!"

Can a bump sob?

I hummed a little to hide any sounds that might be around.

"Pleasant night, don't you think, Bertie?"

There was an awful stillness. Not a leaf stirred. Then,

"Y-yes, sir," said the bump.

"Pleasant pear-tree, too," said I.

"Y-yes, sir."

"But shady," I said. "Have you tried the moonlight?"

"N-no, sir," the bump replied.

"Why not?"

"There w-wasn't time."

"Leslie, too," said I, "surely he would have liked to be here."

"He—c-couldn't come, sir," said the bump.

"Too bad. Why not?"

"He c-couldn't reach it?"

"Ah," said I. "What *was* the game?"

There was no reply.

"Melons aren't ripe," I said, irrelevantly. "What *was* the game, anyhow?"

"Knights," said the bump. It was a shy-voiced bump.

"And you," said I, "were—?"

"Lanc'lot."

"Ah! You had been—imprisoned, as it were?"

"Y-yes, sir."

It was a beautiful night for knights. I had half a mind—"Tut," I told myself, "you're an old fool, Jerry."

"It's one o'clock," said I, knocking the

ashes from my pipe. "Think I'll turn in, if you don't mind, Lancelot."

"No, sir."

"Mind going back alone?" I asked—"in the dark?"

"Oh no, sir," said the bump, bravely.

"The—way you came?" I asked.

"Yes, sir." It was an eager bump.

"Good-night," said I.

I went inside. Carefully I locked the doors behind me. Then, as I stood upstairs, musing by the window of Kate's room and mine, a pleasant, grating sound came from the pear-tree—and made me sigh.

VI

RIDAY: I walked homeward from the office, it was so golden an afternoon. Why, I know not, but my spirits sank slowly with the sun. Even the pleasant sound of bells in the street behind me sent my thoughts backward to Beecher's Lane.

Tinkle-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle—

"Cow-bells," said I, thinking of the meadows, of Bess and Buttercup, Milkweed and Daisy—the Beecher Jerseys—and the boy named Bill who drove them, on just such soft-aired evenings, through the bars. I wonder where that lad is now.

Tinkle-tinkle—

They were coming nearer, some herd, doubtless, bound for the country.

Tinkle-tinkle-tinkle-tinkle—

It was irresistible. I stopped and turned to them.

"Ra-ags!"

Bah! It was nothing but an old-clothes cart with cow-bells strung across a wire and tinkling mockingly. I could have throttled the dirty little Jew.

"As he ought to be," I growled, "for driving such an old, little grandfather of a horse."

Tinkle-tinkle—

"Poor old cow-bells," thought I, sadly, to myself as I turned my back again—or, rather, it was a boy grown tall who mused of them. "Sweet, old bells, to what base usage you have fallen in these evil days—you who were once the trade-mark of scented lanes."

The town still grows and changes. Soon, I suppose, they will ask for our gray-blue house and its vines and lilacs and its old pear-trees. The square opposite was sold this morning—every gray stone of it, every

green leaf and fragrant flower—to build, they tell me, a row of flats there, five stories high, ere the year is gone.

I turned at my gate to gaze at the grim old mansion, feeling a sadness for its doom.

"Poor, frowning thing," I mused. "I wonder if any one ever loved you?"

The Princess did not; in years she has never been once in Chaffinch Street. Her father, the millionaire, died long ago. Her mother's cheeks, they say, must have been very beautiful when she was young; and she herself, Princess of a boy's first wondering dream of gold, is a widow now. The captain, it seems, proved far too handsome to love but one woman; the Princess, I hear it whispered, proved far too fair to waste that beauty sighing, so she holds a court somewhere in Italy (on a terrace, Barbara), from which float airy rumors now and then. First it was to be a count, and then a baron; when last we heard it was to be only another of those every-day millionaires.

As I gazed at her old home opposite I felt a pity for its loneliness. When its stones are razed there will be no one to shed a tear for them; no one has dwelt among them long enough to care, and so to no one will those shattered walls be so many broken pieces of a precious past.

No one?

Yes, I told myself, there will be two mourners there — two who never owned stick or stone or leaf or flower in all that square will watch their passing and be sorry, for the sake of other days and other dreams, however sad or foolish and cast away.

Then I turned to my little home behind me—old and scarred but seeming a part of its flowered setting. I felt a tugging at my heart-strings.

"Sell you! You, little house! You!" I told myself. I could have crushed it in my arms. Why, all my world was there—all, then, save Katie. For after Jamie and his little years had gone, the gray-blue

house grew slowly, strangely beautiful with vines and memories and the voices of other children climbing its lap in play. Lilacs and pear-trees, gables and moss-grown shingles, the little garden, the little walk bordered by pinks and leading downward from the great world—world of love—into the little one—world of toil—in time have shone again, something as on that first morning when the little boy who was to be a hero ran up those three gray steps beyond the jug.

In life we found, in life as in love, even the common things blossomed in course of time. Things in the first chapters have wondrous meaning, sometimes, in the end.

Only this morning there came a carpenter to mend a leak in the old roof.

"Careful!" said I. "Don't rub the moss off those shingles."

The fellow turned on his ladder and grinned derisively.

"If I owned 'em I'd chuck 'em all," said he.

"I'm not so sure of that," I replied, warmly. "Genuine cedar shingles don't grow on every roof, and those were laid there long before you were born, young man."

"That there vine," said he, "ought to come off."

"Hold on!" I cried; "the leak isn't there!"

"No, but there'll be one there, and in mighty short order, too, if you let that vine lie around."

"Never mind," said I, "we won't cross bridges. That vine has lain there some little time."

"Just as you say," he retorted, testily, "but, as the fellow says, 'an ounce of prevent-ation is worth a pound of cure.'"

"A new way of putting it," said I.

"And vines make houses—*r-rotten*," he called down to me, wrenching a shingle off by way of emphasis. It brought the blood to my face.

"Easy! easy!" I protested, shuddering,

for to me it was surgery that the brute was performing there. When it was over I breathed more easily, but at that glaring yellow patch I shook my head.

"Now if your whole roof was like that," said the carpenter, "and you'd tear down them old vines and pull up some of them old bushes and trim up these here old trees, you'd have as neat-a-looking place as there is in Chaffinch Street."

"Pardon *me*," said I. "Do you think it will rain?"

"Does look some like it," he replied, scanning the sky.

"Thank God," I said, so fervently that he stared inquiringly. "A few good storms, young man," I added, pausing to let his brain catch up to me, "will heal that gaping wound up there."

Barbara tells me that after I had gone he turned to her and tapped his forehead with the knuckles of his hairy hand.

Dear Barbara! Her hands are full of

boys. I found her sitting in the garden with a pocket-handkerchief.

"Why, what's the matter, pretty one?" said I.

"N-nothing," she replied, sighing and twisting a damp little lace-edged square.

"Come, come," I said, seating myself beside her. "There is something wrong!"

Still she was silent. I slipped my arm about her and drew her cosily to my side.

"Tired?" I asked.

"N-nop."

"Angry?"

"N-nop."

"Just sad?"

She nodded her head.

"Why?" I asked. "Is it the boys?"

She nodded again. Then she found a little shred of a piping voice, tremulous, threatening to break.

"They—they were horrid!"

"To you?" I asked.

"Um. I only—I only wanted them to be clean—that's all."

"Were they little pigs?"

"Yes. They were all speckle-dy."

"Spattered, you mean?"

"Yes, speckle-dy. I told them they mustn't go over to the Pidgeons' till they'd washed their faces, but they—went."

"Are they over there now?" I asked, preparing to follow.

"No. The Pidgeons took them for a trolley ride."

"All speckle-dy?"

"Yes. They wouldn't wash, and they—laughed at me."

"Little wretches!" I muttered.

"Uncle Jerry, I try so hard to be a—m-m-mother to them."

I had never seen so many tears. There was a whole brook of them trickling down.

"Darling," said I, "now don't you cry. I know how—"

"But I'm so—young, Uncle Jerry."

"There, there," said I. "You are

doing beautifully, beautifully, my dear Barbara, beautifully. Why, the devil himself couldn't manage those boys sometimes. Even I can't always do it."

"Aunt Kate can."

"Ah, well, Aunt Kate, of course. But she's their mother."

"I try to do just as she does."

"Yes, I know," I said.

"I try to be sweet with them."

"And you *are* sweet with them, my dear. Doesn't it work?"

She shook her head.

"I called them 'dearies,'" she explained, "and they laughed at me."

"Imps!" said I. "Wait till I—"

"The sweeter I am the badder they are." With that she laughed a little herself and put her hair out of her eyes.

"I know I'm a sight!" she said—being a woman, albeit young.

"You're an angel," I declared. "Poor little soul, they shall go down on their knees to you. You shall see. Now they

really adore you, my dear, though they are a bit awkward at showing it, I'll admit. But, come now—be of good cheer."

"You're not so *terribly* cheerful yourself, Uncle Jerry."

"What!" said I. "Not cheerful—I?"

"You're putting it on," she replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, your face, Uncle Jerry, when you came up the path, was as long as—"

"Nonsense!" said I. "I was only thinking."

"Why did you sigh so?"

"Sigh so? I sigh?"

"Yes—twice. Before you came by the bush and saw me here."

"Did I?"

"You sighed twice."

"I was tired, I suppose."

"No," said my niece, firmly. "It was not a tired sigh."

"But you were so busy sighing yourself," I protested, "how did you happen to notice me?"

"Aunt Kate told me to."

"To what?"

"Watch."

"Watch what?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Signs."

"Signs!" I cried—"of what, Barbara?"

"Lonesomeness."

"I lonesome!" I exclaimed. "*I*, with you here and the boys and all these nice little birds and things! It is far more likely that your aunt is homesick, my dear."

"She does seem homesick," said my niece.

"You think so, too?" I inquired.

"Oh yes, Uncle Jerry. You can see it sticking right out of her letters."

"Well, do you know," said I, "that's just what I've been thinking."

"There where she said—don't you re-

member, Uncle Jerry?—in her last letter —the part where she said she would have given that whole tea-party for one good cup with us at home? That sounded awfully suspicious, I thought."

"I noticed it, too."

"And there where she spoke about Leslie taking cold, Uncle Jerry—"

"Yes," said I, "I remember."

"Where she said, 'Jerry, now do be careful about keeping him covered nights.' Why, I could just hear Aunt Kate!"

"Yes, yes," said I. "Oh, she misses us, Barbara. She misses us. There isn't a doubt about it. Leslie's a little delicate, you know, and Kate's always worrying about him."

"He seemed flushed to-day," said my niece. "I was a little worried myself, but I think it was the heat."

"He'd been playing hard, doubtless," I said.

"Yes. Wild West."

"That would account for it. Oh, she's

homesick, Barbara. There is no use talking—she's homesick. And, I tell you, when I think of that poor girl up there suffering—loneliness *is* suffering—homesick and lonely, while you and I and the boys are having such — such jolly times together down here at home—why, I—by George! it doesn't seem right somehow. It seems selfish in us."

"I had meant to do so much this week," sighed Barbara. "I wanted to read, but somehow I haven't felt like it."

"Nor I," I replied. "The books have been stupid. The tobacco's been strong. I don't know what's got into it, but I'm afraid I shall have to change my brand. It used to be mild, but the last few pipes I've smoked—George! I don't seem to enjoy it at all. I tried to read *Pickwick* last night, and, do you know, it seemed to me that there were several scenes there just a *lee*-tle bit overdrawn."

"The house hasn't seemed the same," said my niece.

"And the garden," said I; "have you noticed anything—anything in particular, Barbara, about the garden?"

"The garden?" she queried, looking about her.

"It may sound foolish, I'll admit," said I, "but I've been watching, and, by George! it seems to me that there aren't so many flowers blooming since Kate went away. Now I've read somewhere that there *are* people who have a most wonderfully healthful influence over plants, so that flowers always grow for them, while for other folk, in the very same identical place, they only wilt and die."

"She's always fussing about with a trowel," said my niece. "Don't you think that might account for it?"

"Possibly," I replied. "Still, I have a notion that there is more in the mere influence than we imagine. It is true in other matters—on you and me, for instance, as we have said, Kate's influence is sweet and soothing—"

"And trowel-y?" my niece suggested.

"Yes," I assented, laughing. "Trowel-y, to be sure. I'm awfully weedy just at present, Barbara. Well, now, if it is true of human beings, why not of flowers?"

"It's a nice idea," she said.

"We know," said I, "that she is lonesome for her garden. She says as much. Well, do you know, I can believe that her garden is lonesome for her."

"I'd like to see her myself," Barbara confessed.

"Would you?" I asked. "Just how do you feel about it. How does it affect you, I mean? Does the house seem large, for instance?"

"O-oh, *big!*" she answered.

"And kind of—hollow-sounding?"

"Echo-y," said my niece.

"And do you catch yourself yawning?"

"Yes."

"And sighing all day long, without any particular reason that you can think of?'

"Yes, often, Uncle Jerry. And I get sleepy by eight o'clock."

"And does the dark out in the yard," I asked, "seem still and dismal?"

"Spooky," she replied, shuddering.

"And the trolley-cars," said I, "away off in the distance, while you are trying to get to sleep, do they sound like some one moaning?"

"Yes," cried my niece. "I had never thought of it—but they do, Uncle Jerry! They do!"

"And do you lie there listening," said I —"listening and turning, and turning and listening, and thinking and wondering why in the name of time they ever made weeks seven days long?"

"Yes," sighed Barbara, "it seems a year since Saturday."

I shook my head.

"Yours is certainly a most interesting case, my dear," said I.

Then we sat awhile, silently, till Barbara sighed.

"Dear Aunt Kate! She's *so* lovely."

"Yes," said I.

"So gentle," said my niece.

"Yes," said I.

"And so *young*, Uncle Jerry. Why, she's twice as much fun as some of the girls I know."

"I can believe you."

"Oh, I hope she'll never be disappointed, or anything, Uncle Jerry, and go and get bitter like old Aunt Sarah."

"Never fear," said I. "It takes more than a thunder-storm, Barbara, to sour the milk of human kindness."

"Why, only to be in the same place with her is beautiful," said my niece.

"Yes," I sighed.

"And her face, Uncle Jerry. Sometimes—it's like a picture!"

"So it is."

"And her smile, Uncle Jerry. Did you ever notice her smile?"

"Oh yes."

"And her eyes?"

"Often, my dear."

My niece was thoughtful.

"What is it, sometimes, in Aunt Kate's eyes that makes them look as if the tears were coming? Yet she doesn't cry."

I patted her hand.

"Ah, that, my dear, is Yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes—all the things that have ever happened."

"But then again, Uncle Jerry, her eyes dance."

"Like yours," I said, smoothing her hair.

"And what is that?"

"Well, that's To-morrow."

We both sat thinking again, silent, till Barbara sighed—it is contagious.

"I think I'll go in," I said, rising, "and write a letter."

"I'm afraid I've been awfully foolish," my niece apologized, rising with me, for my arm was about her waist. "But I just had to bubble over."

"Of course," I said. "We all do. She will have it to-morrow morning if it's mailed by six."

I had reached the bottom of the fourth page, I remember, when a thought struck me.

"By George! Barbara, I'd like to add a postscript."

"To say what, Uncle Jerry?"

"Why—not to stay any longer, if she feels—"

"Oh, what would Aunt Phœbe say?"

"I was thinking of that."

"It would never do," said my niece.

"No," I replied. "But do you really think she'll stay the month out?"

"It doesn't seem so. A month is a long time, Uncle Jerry."

"So *she* says."

I addressed the envelope.

"By George!" said I.

"What, Uncle Jerry?"

"Nothing; I was only thinking."

I did not seal the letter just at once.

There was time enough to light my pipe, and while I did so—

"Barbara," said I, "did you feel of Leslie's head when he came in flushed to-day?"

"Yes. It was awfully hot. Still, he'd been playing Wild West, you know."

"Were his hands dry?"

"Really, I didn't notice, Uncle Jerry."

"You should always be careful to observe that, Barbara. It is a very important indication."

Then happening to remember that the letter was still unsent, I added, hastily, a line or two that had come to mind—sealed it, and took my hat.

"I'll run around to the sub-station," I explained, "just to make sure that it goes by six."

VII

ATURDAY: I rose earlier than my wont. The bloom was on the morning, the boughs so full of choristers I wondered I had ever lain so deafly to a later hour. The green below, the cloudless, sun-bright blue above, the breath of the garden still cool with night and sweet with old-fashioned posies went to my head like wine.

"Thank God!" said I, but less for the morning, May-fair and wondrous though it was, than for the brimming heart I felt within. It was a sign to me — that my youth still flowered.

"Good-morning, James," I said to the milkman's son. I said it carelessly, as coldly, as condescendingly as I could—to

prove, no doubt, that though I was still a boy I was a man as well. Then I walked soberly into the garden, which I think I told you—no?—is called Kate's Delight. When her callers come, even though after three of a likely, fair afternoon, they are apt to find her, I am told, with the watering-can. It is not allowed by the regulations, but no one cavils, I believe—for they go through the gate smiling and far more gorgeously than they came.

"I will be gardener to-day," said I, "as an appetizer." So I pruned a little. I put wistaria in the parlor; in the dining-room, almond flowers and bleeding-hearts; in the library, lilacs.

"Why, Uncle Jerry!" said a voice from an upper window—there was a sleepy face there, too, I could hear plainly, but could not see it for the screening leaves—"I thought you were abed."

"The morning," I replied, virtuously—for early risers, I observe, whether daily or otherwise, can never let well-enough alone

—"the morning is far too fine for folk to lie abed wasting the golden hours. For shame, Barbara! Slothful one, canst thou not hear the dicky-birds carolling in the greenwood-tree? Dost thou not see thy uncle about a fragrant business of herbs and honey? Up, girl! Up! Dost hear me?"

There was no answer. It is the way with sluggards, daily or otherwise. There is no cheerfulness among them, no view-halloo, no pipe and tabor, no repartee. She came down yawning.

"Lilacs," she said. "Why, Uncle Jerry, you—"

"The vases were all so small," I said.

My niece looked pensive. I thought it a cobweb hanging from some recent dream, but it seems she was really thinking.

"Didn't you tell me once—" she began.

"Possibly," I replied.

"Wasn't there something in a story you

made up for me—don't you remember?—that night last fall? Why, yes, there was!"

"Was there?"

"Oh, Uncle Jerry!" she exclaimed. Her eyes had lost all trace of sleep.

"What?" I asked, carelessly.

"*Now* I know."

"Know what?"

"Why you wouldn't make Madelaine tall and willowy."

"Barbara," said I, "don't you want to get two or three sprays of bridal wreath for that table there?"

While she was gone Bert and Leslie came down the banister. One astir is apt to be all astir in the morning. Let me leave no unkind impression of those boys. We had settled that score of Barbara's—painlessly, on the whole—the night before. They had bowed down humbly before her and had risen the better men for it. This morning they looked the world frankly in the eyes.

I gazed meditatively upon them, care-

ful, however, to conceal the admiration I confess I felt. In the first place, they were mine—but that, let me say it honestly, had nothing to do with their good looks, which are of Kate, nor with that taking way of theirs, which is of Kate also, and which, as I told myself this morning, is so irresistible that the devil himself must melt before it and be moved to leave them to the end the angels that they are—at heart. It may be that they coddle their father, just a bit, now and again, but he thrives upon it, for it is wonderful how the flower of a man's youth — ay, or woman's—will bloom perennially tended by little hands.

Here, then, are two somethings to smile at, even when I am sad, even when I am fretted, say, after all my philosophy, by the pinching way the world has with a man's pocket-book—for, remember, pony-time is drawing nigh again. This I know —as a father, mind, for I never guessed it as a younger boy; fate has no lash in store

for me so stinging that the sight of those two young sons of mine, sound of their voices, glance of their eyes, or touch of their sun-browned hands cannot make me grin—and bear.

What they saw this morning was only an elderly sort of fellow gazing upon them in a calm (in dear old *Pickwick* it would have been a benevolent) sort of way from the garden bench, while they ran foot-races to his knees.

"Well," said I, as we sat at breakfast, "she has her letter."

It sounds but simple, and I said it casually with my eyes on my porridge-bowl, but, I give you my word for it, I felt relieved that my mind was free again.

"Who's 'she,' father?"

"There's only one, my boy."

"Mother?"

"Who else would it be?"

"What letter, father?"

"The one I mailed last night at six."

"Father," cried Bert, "if we could only surprise her!"

"Surprise her?"

"Yes—go to Pineville—all of us!"

"But how about trains? Do they run," I asked, "on Saturday afternoons?"

"Why, Uncle Jerry," said my niece, "you know they do. Else why were you looking at the time-table while I went for the flowers?"

"Do all time-tables—do all roads lead to Pineville, Barbara Burton?"

"No, but that one did. It had a blue cross upon it."

"And all blue-cross trains, I suppose, Mistress Barbara, run to Pineville?"

"Uncle Jerry, you were planning to run away!"

"To spend Sunday, father!" cried my elder son.

"Father, take me!" cried my younger.

"Me, too, father!"

"Oh, Uncle Jerry!"

And they doubted every protesting word

I said. They would not trust me to go alone for my hat, but peered suspiciously for some sign, outward and visible, of a scheme within. They looked for an old-fashioned black valise which has stood for years in the garret dust. Kate, they knew, had the only good bag the house affords. They followed me down the walk to the gate. They watched me pass thence to the corner, and, as I turned it, waved good-bye to me with a wistfulness that seemed to say, "Till Monday."

"By George!" said I, "I've a good mind—"

And the more I thought of it the more it seemed to me a goodly sort of picture: two boys, illumined — Barbara getting them into their blue-and-white-striped waists and tying their ties for them—arraying herself in a certain fetching little rosebud kind of Sunday gown, while I stand by in a clean collar with a watch open in my hand!

"By George!" said I.

And on the cars!—telegraph-poles a-popping by us and May fields with their dandelions and sheep—two boys wiggling on one seat, Barbara and I sedate but cheerful on the other opposite—to say nothing of the tin cup shining at the aisle's far end, a beacon beckoning to happy little travelling boys.

"George!" said I, again.

Brother George, I meant — Brother George at the Pineville station, summoned by telegram—his three-seat waiting there by the yellow 'bus—and Kate, Kate, dear old girl, on the platform, smothered in boys!

"Look out where you're going, can't you!"

It was a nasty voice, hot-breathed and growling in my very ear, like a bull-dog's. I begged the fellow's pardon—begged it twice, but he only scowled at me. Talk of courtesy! I heard him damning—his foot, I think it was, or me, I'm not quite sure—as I turned up the office steps.

Well, it all came about this very even-

ing as I had seen: two little sons, illumined—their clean waists, blue and white, and their ties tied for them — Barbara in her rosebud gown, and I in a clean collar—two wiggling sons, as I have said —Barbara cheerful, and I, and Kate!—Kate at the journey's end smothered in boys!—but not (oh, bless you, no!) not in Pineville. It was on our own little gray-blue porch with the sun just going down and the moon rising.

"Kate!" I cried.

"Jerry, darling!"

"Dear heart," said I, "why, how did you happen—I thought—why you said you would stay a month!"

"I know, but you wrote—"

"Yes, but I didn't mean — I didn't dream I would frighten you."

"Frighten me!"

"Yes—about Leslie."

"Leslie!"

"Why, didn't you get it—my letter? I mailed it last night at six."

"Letter! Leslie!"

"Oh, it's nothing," I cried. "He got overheated, that's all, and I—"

"But, Jerry, he's all right now?"

"Oh yes. But I happened to mention—"

"Why, his head is cool."

"Cool as January. Of course. I was foolish enough to put it down in the letter I wrote last night, and I thought—was afraid it had scared you home. But you haven't told us."

"Oh, I just thought I would come."

"But why?"

"You didn't expect me to stay a month, did you?"

"I wondered if you could, you seemed so lonely."

"Lonely! Why, Jerry Down, it was you who were lonely."

"I!"

"You! Your letters were the mournfulest things I ever saw. That's why I came."

"My letters mournful!"

"As the grave, Jerry."

"Why—why, I never once said I was lonely. It was you who—"

"You didn't *say* so, that is true, but, Jerry, Jerry, I could tell by the very blanks between the lines that you never could stand it a month. And you kept inferring that *I* was lonely, and how could you think that unless—"

"How could I think that! How could I help thinking that, Kate Down? Of all the homesickest letters I ever read!"

"Mine!"

"Yours."

"Why, I never once—"

"I can prove it by Barbara. She noticed it, too."

"And you thought I was lonely!" said my wife.

"And you thought *I* was lonely!" I replied.

We looked at each other.

"Now I know!" cried Bert.

"What?" we asked.

"Why father was looking at the time-table this morning."

"And why he got up so early and put the flowers around," said Barbara, slyly.

My wife looked at me.

"Tut!" said I. "The merest coincidence."

"Why, how," said my wife, slowly—"how did you know I was coming?"

"I didn't. I didn't know anything."

"But what made you think I might come, then?"

"I never said that I thought you might come."

"Then why did you fix the flowers?" Bert asked.

"And look at the time-table?" Barbara inquired.

"Oh, I just glanced at it," said I—"casually. It was on the table, I suppose, as I passed, so I—"

"It was nothing of the kind," my niece declared. "It was in the secretary, and

you went and got it yourself—for I saw you."

"Did I?" I inquired.

My wife's cheek pressed Leslie's brow as he sat snuggled in her lap. Bert hung upon her chair. Her eyes were sparkling.

"His head is cool," she said—but slyly, it seemed to me.

"Oh, yes—cool now," said I, "but you ought to have felt it yesterday—eh, Barbara?"

"It *was* hot," my niece assented, "but Uncle Jerry decided it was only his playing too hard."

"What *did* you say in that letter, Jerry?" asked my wife.

"Why, I merely mentioned the incident," I explained.

"But as long as you thought it so trivial, dearest," she reproved me, beaming upon me, "I should think you would have been afraid even to mention it for fear of—frightening me home, you know."

"But you wanted to come," I retorted.

"Jerry!"

"You were just waiting for an excuse," I said.

"Why, Jerry Down!"

"Uncle!"

"Father!"

I was one against three.

After the children had gone to bed we were sitting together in the garden. It was just such an evening as they put in love-stories, moon-white and tranquil and scented with spring.

"Now," said I, "we begin to live again."

"I couldn't stay," she told me. "It is so lovely here. Were the boys," she asked—"Just smell the lilacs, Jerry!—were the boys good while I was gone?"

"Angels," I told her. Then she was silent awhile, laying her cheek against my hand.

"Now if Jamie could only be here, too," she said.

"Still thinking, Katie?"

"Not a day passes—"

"I know, dear one."

Then as we sat there talking, with that little gray-blue house of ours bathed in a fairy gloaming, we saw, through the windows in the vines, the lamplight golden on the lilacs I had plucked that morn.

"You never noticed."

"Yes, when I first came in."

It was the Older Woman's face she turned to me, lovely with memories where the dreams had been.

The clock struck midnight, there was so much to say. Up-stairs by the very window where the pear-tree knocks I stood and watched her as she tucked them in.

"Dear little sons," she whispered—then turned in the moonlight and took my rough cheeks softly in her hands:

"My biggest boy—oh, if they'll only be like you!" she said.

Brook, did I call it? It is a garden hidden behind a hedge. Trudging the highway you see no flowers blooming — but when the wind is kind a perfume comes to you from somewhere near.

THE END